

# adventist today

NEWS  
ANALYSIS  
OPINION

volume eleven | number two | march, april 2003

## JOSHUA 11:7

212

all of them over to Israel, slain. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."

7So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, 8and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued

the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Kaim, to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, and no survivors were left. 9Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

10At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.) 11Everyone in Hazor was put to the sword. They totally destroyed the city, not sparing anything that was left, and he burned up Hazor itself:

12Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. 13Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned. 14The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword.

# Adventism & WAR

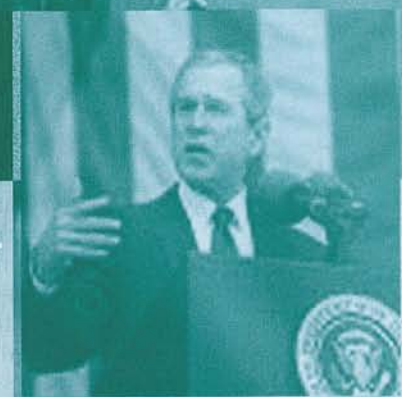
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mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

### 11:23 Two Accounts of Warfare







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## Faith or Gullibility?

JOHN MCLARTY

A number of my friends have been strongly supportive of the war in Iraq from the first mention of its possibility by President Bush. When I ask why, they've answered that Mr. Bush would not have ordered the war if it weren't necessary. When I ask about the minimal evidence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), they reply, Mr. Bush must know more than the public knows. One of my friends told me, "God intervened in the last election to bring Mr. Bush to the presidency so that he could direct this war against the evil Saddam Hussein. Mr. Bush is God's man pursuing God's war."

I am not persuaded. This kind of unquestioning faith in a political leader looks to me like gullibility. Politicians are not known for their rigorous devotion to truth-telling. I have no more reason to trust this president when he talks about Saddam Hussein than I did to trust the previous president when he talked about women. Responsible political faith can come only after we have asked very tough questions and gotten answers that are verified by people with minimal vested interest in the issue at hand.

Maybe this war is moral. (See Janine Goffar's article.) But at the time of this writing (April 2, 2003) the Allied forces have been in Iraq for two weeks. So far they have not found WMD stockpiles. The Iraqis have not used WMDs on the invaders. The Iraqi people have not welcomed the Allies as liberators. There have even been news reports of expatriate Iraqis returning home to help fight the Americans. Maybe by the time this issue reaches you, Mr. Bush will have been proved right. Maybe the WMDs will have been found or, worse, used. Maybe we will discover that the surprising Iraqi resistance has only been the fruit of the domestic terrorist practices of Mr. Hussein's Baath party goons. Maybe peace will come and a freer, healthier, happier nation will begin rising from the ashes of the war. But to have great confidence in these predicted outcomes just because the president says so seems to me to reach beyond faith to gullibility.

The question of where the line runs between faith and gullibility arises not just in political matters. It arises in our religious and spiritual life as well. Am I acting as a responsible believer or as a credulous naif when I automatically trust what is asserted by the church and disregard any ideas of scientists, historians, theologians and artists that raise questions about some of our venerable traditions? The question can also be turned around: Am I being merely gullible when I automatically credit the latest research or the assured results of scholarship any time they contradict the wisdom acquired through the decades of Adventist experience or the centuries of Christian reflection?

Some people are threatened by any call to think critically. They fear that any open questioning will collapse the church and destroy the joy of confident trust in God. This anxiety is under-

**Blind, unquestioning faith is often indistinguishable from gullibility. Healthy faith that expresses itself in bold, noble action grows out of honest, thoughtful questioning.**

standable, but out of touch with reality. The Adventist Church has always been changing. It is a growing organism; nothing can grow without changing. And there are many Adventists living in joyous faith and happy obedience who have asked hard questions and, on occasion, changed their minds.

Blind, unquestioning faith is often indistinguishable from gullibility. Healthy faith that expresses itself in bold, noble action grows out of honest, thoughtful questioning.

God does not call us to the mindless obedience of soldiers, but to the informed and sacrificial (and sometimes heroic) cooperation of friends. God's ultimate goal for his people is not the unthinking carrying out of orders, but full participation in the decision-making at the core of the universe. Preparing for that role does require faith. It precludes gullibility. ■



# contents

## news

PAGE 6

War is Sometimes Moral  
By Janine Goffar

PAGE 7

Letter From Jan Paulsen Regarding His Sermon  
By Jan Paulsen

PAGE 8

IRAQ: Despite Bombing in Baghdad  
Adventists Attend Worship Services  
By James Stirling

## features

PAGE 10

Two Authorities, or One?  
By Kenneth Richards

PAGE 12

Reinventing Adventist History:  
How Historians Transformed Adventist Heritage  
By Ciro Sepulveda

PAGE 16

Adventists and Genetically Modified Foods  
By Clive Holland

PAGE 20

Should Adventist Doctrine Be Logical?  
By Joe Greig



## book review

PAGE 9

When Science Meets Religion:  
Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?  
By Ervin Taylor

## thank you

PAGE 24

Message From the Chair/Publisher  
By Elwin Dunn

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## Beyond Protestantism

I appreciated your article [John McLarty editorial] on "Beyond Protestantism" (AT Jan/Feb 2002). As a La Sierra grad who became a Quaker minister, I related to much of your expressed sentiments. Although some may consider my becoming a Quaker a rejection of my Adventist heritage, from my vantage it was a way for me to affirm the primitive origins of our common "Anabaptist" heritage. I think the SDA denomination has veered more and more toward the Magisterial Protestant model and away from its radical "spirit led" roots. Adventists are right that the "spirit of prophecy" is a mark of the true church; however, too many restraints [have] been placed on the spirit of prophecy. Magisterial Protestants like to measure out the outpouring in approved doses (Ellen White, the Bible, the Clergy). They're the self-appointed pharmacy reps in a world where God wants to dispense life-saving medicine to whosoever will.

Although some may consider my becoming a Quaker a rejection of my Adventist heritage, from my vantage it was a way for me to affirm the primitive origins of our common "Anabaptist" heritage.

None of this is new to denominations, indeed, choking off the divine supply is part of the eternal war between the laity and the leadership. The Quaker model gives the people a voice and guarantees that those who seek to rise don't rise above the people, but rise with the people. This is the pre-Saul model, whereas Protestants tend toward the post-Davidic. I have never regretted following the prophets instead of the priests; the one is inclusive, God chooses the prophets, but the other is exclusive, only Levites get to play at the temple.

**Jesse Leamon | Via the Internet**

## Croft and Corson

The last copy of *Adventist Today* (Nov/Dec 2002) was especially interesting, as it touched a very sensitive chord with my husband [and] me, as we have had a similar problem inside the church.... About 10 years ago [we] along with about six other people started studying some of the subjects that Randy A. Croft and Ron Corson have written about, such as the Investigative Judgment and is Ellen White without error. We came up with some differences with the SDA beliefs on those subjects. We were called "kooks" by the pastor, embarrassed from the pulpit until all eight of us left the church. Now, ten years later, five of us have returned.... The church we attend now [has a] different pastor. He is a wonderful Christian and

knows our different beliefs, but has told us he has no problem with what we believe. He said we are to be united in Christ, not in every thought.

**Beverly Story**

## Faculty on Welfare

There is an article in the September-October issue that captured my interest, ... "SDA Faculty on Welfare?" Here is my problem with that article. I have for years served on executive committees, in several capacities. We would each year study salaries, subsidies and other factors. I like to think that I'm not narrow-minded or very forgetful. I can read summaries, financial statements, etc.

The article in question may be accurate in some ways; however, your...article seems to leave out many items. These items are very important to persons wishing to understand the truth. In my opinion the article is misleading; i.e., it mentions salaries and expenses,

however, does not mention subsidies, i.e., living, moving, education, auto, insurance, etc. Would you please let me know when subsidies were discontinued, or if they are still a part of a teacher/preacher package[?]

The article sends a dishonest message to persons in the field. Do me this favor soon please. I'd like to know what the "real story" is. Lay people are not told many things; however, they are not brain dead. Please do your best in the answer.

**Edwin Siemens, M.D. | Via the Internet**

## Riley Answers

Dr. Siemens's concern about the "real story" on compensation is not unique. I have heard this same concern expressed by board members, conference presidents and treasurers. Also, the former NAD treasurer and most recent NAD remuneration task force chairmen have personally expressed the same concern to me: "When you count 'benefits' you don't qualify for welfare, do you?" The answer is yes! The state aid organizations are not interested in what the church puts to my retirement; the criteria is what income I receive each month that can be used to support my family.

Concerning the "teacher/preacher package," with the exception of medical, dental and tuition assistance, the benefits are not the same, and differences



exist even with similar benefits. I will limit discussion to salary "enhancement" benefits to try to explain the "real story" for pastors and teachers. Pastors receive three such benefits: reduced taxes due to the parsonage allowance, area travel, and auto insurance; the last two are cash for use of their personal car. I have for some time tried to affix a value to the parsonage allowance and have discussed how to do this with several pastors and conference/union/division people. It is not easily done due to the variable conditions for each pastor based on how they live. Pastors do pay their own social security, so I am willing to allow that to offset the compensation gained by tax reductions due to the parsonage allowance. The value of the automobile benefit (travel plus insurance) to pastors is in the range of \$4,000 annually.

As a teacher, the only salary "enhancement" benefit I receive is a professional development fund, which WWC has had for about 11 years. This allows for the reimbursement of expenses associated with professional development (books, software, conference travel, computer equipment and so on). These funds were initially set up, as recommended by the college accrediting organizations, to demonstrate greater differences in compensation amongst the faculty ranks. The values have been as follows: Instructor—nothing, Assistant Professor—\$500, Associate Professor—\$3,000, and Professor—\$4,500. Until this year, these funds were not given as cash, but reimbursable for expenses associated with work. Last year, due to the severe underfunding of faculty salaries, the administration took these funds and raised the Instructor and Assistant to \$1,500, left the other two at \$3,000 and \$4,500, and then split them in half, and gave half as salary, with the remaining half still used for a reimbursable expense fund. This was meant to help the lowest-paid faculty to receive something closer to a "living wage."

However, this does not make a significant impact on my ability to support my family, due to new required deductions. As an Associate Professor, I receive \$1,500 this year, payable biweekly. This amounts to, before tax, \$62.50 a pay check. However, I am now required to pay health care premiums of \$110 per month (\$55 in each biweekly paycheck). This produces a net "benefit" of \$7.50 per paycheck, or \$15 a month. My tax withholdings are about 11.6 percent (federal, social security, Medicare and worker's comp); this makes the new development "benefit" worth, after tax, just less than 50 cents

a month! That is the "real story."

My 2002 W-2 form shows the total "Wages, tips, other compensation" as \$38,724.32; this is for a full-time tenured Associate Professor of Engineering with 12 years of service to the college, and is many thousands less than a pastor 6 years out of college. There is nothing "hidden" in that number. It is this number that is used to determine if I am able to support my family, which for the health of my children, the state has deemed I am not!

**Don Riley | College Place, Wash.**

## SOMEONE YOU KNOW DESERVES A WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD!

The Association of Adventist Women is soliciting nominations for its 2003 Women of the Year awards that will be presented at the annual AAW convention to be held in Loma Linda, Calif., Oct. 16-19, 2003.

"Too often the enormous contributions of Seventh-day Adventist women are overlooked," says Toini Harrison, coordinator of the Women of the Year program. "These prestigious awards are designed to recognize the broad spectrum of accomplishments of Adventist women around the world."

Nominees should be Seventh-day Adventist women who have made outstanding and unique contributions to home, community and/or professional life. The deadline for submitting nominations is May 20, 2003.

Should you wish to nominate someone, please request a nomination form. Write or call:

Toini Harrison

Women of the Year Coordinator

Association of Adventist Women

24414 University Ave, No. 167

Loma Linda, CA 92354

Phone: (909) 799-5448

E-mail: [kaynelson@earthlink.net](mailto:kaynelson@earthlink.net)

### Send Letters to the Editor:

[atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com) or

Adventist Today, P.O. Box 8026

Riverside, CA 92515-8026







to expect others to die for them.”

Whether any particular war is moral or is carried out morally is a separate question, and an entirely arguable one. I fully respect those who are deeply concerned, for example, about the potential effects of the war the United States, at the time of this writing, is contemplating with Iraq. I share many of their concerns. They must be weighed carefully against the other set of concerns regarding what will happen in the future if the current Iraqi regime is left in place.

The morality or immorality of war is always contextual, always dependent upon the end-in view, the probability of success and the means employed. A moral war aims to reduce the sum of potential human suffering in the world, which is in line with Christian principles. Our national and international leaders must constantly be considering these questions.

Of course the non-violent, non-war solutions are always preferable, if they exist. Every one of them must be tried first if there is the slightest chance of success. Nobody is arguing that war is ever the first preferable alternative. It is the last. But sometimes it is necessary.

Is the Bible against war? Certainly such a case cannot be made from the Old Testament. That leaves us with the New Testament. Jesus addressed the Roman centurion without making any statement about his profession, that of a warrior. I know of no sentence Jesus spoke that addressed the topic of war directly. Some would say he addressed it indirectly when he spoke of such things as turning the other cheek. I would suggest that he was primarily speaking in these places of our relations with those with whom we live and work, not of an unlimited mandate for all human situations, personal and global. Even in the personal realm, we must sometimes take a stand against evil or against people who are acting in evil ways.

But even if we take Jesus' statement to mean that we ought to always and without exception turn our cheek and offer the other one when we ourselves are being hurt (which I do not), this would still not address the situation of what to do when our brother is being hurt. Surely we are not being told to turn his cheek, also.

Of course the non-violent, non-war solutions are always preferable, if they exist. Every one of them must be tried first if there is the slightest chance of success. Nobody is arguing that war is ever the first preferable alternative. It is the last. But sometimes it is necessary. When it swings open the doors of the stinking concentration camps, when it liberates the slaves, broken and exhausted, when it frees those who are about to be tortured and murdered by the hundreds or thousands or millions, when it makes freedom possible where before existed only gulag, it is a good, not an evil.

Perhaps one day our church will awaken to this, perhaps not. But one thing is certain, and that is the fact that wherever around the world its members enjoy the freedom to worship, that freedom has come almost invariably because someone, some group, at some time, has fought for it.

Are we still comfortable with our old stand? We don't feel right about bearing arms ourselves, but we'll help others who will? No honest person living in the free world can say we have not needed these others to do so on our behalf. How is this intellectually and morally tenable? The newer generations may not be as willing to live with the cognitive dissonance so clear to me now in the traditional Seventh-day Adventist position on this important topic. ■

## LETTER FROM JAN PAULSEN REGARDING HIS SERMON

I have read and reflected on your restrained but kind comments to my sermon at Loma Linda. I suppose that there are some key issues in this discussion that you and I will view differently. "War" was not the subject matter of my sermon; my references to it were as a backdrop for my reflections on the passage of "looking after the widows and orphans in their distress" (James).

I come to the matter of war and our church's historic position from various perspectives. In my own childhood (from age 5 to 10), I shared house with 300 German

soldiers for five years. I lived in Nigeria during the Biafran War of 1966-68. I have seen close up some of the terrible debris which a war leaves behind; and the only "crime" that the children, women and old ones were guilty of is that they were born at a particular time and lived at a particular place. They were otherwise innocent, but unable to protect themselves.

And I have read history. The definition "just war" is so imprecise and diffuse. Is it always "my war"?

And I have searched the mind of Christ, and I find nothing in it to lead

me to take up arms and go to war.

Defending oneself comes in another category, as does the actions of pursuing criminals who must be brought to justice. I see this illustrated in the activities in Afghanistan where the allied Western forces pursued the terrorists who had perpetrated heinous crimes. This was done with great care by the Allied forces not to harm the civilians. These kinds of activities are not what we are talking about.

I believe that nations are meant to find solutions other than wars. And I think that with concerted multinational pressures other means will be found and can succeed. Just these observations. ■



# IRAQ: Despite bombing of Baghdad, Adventists attend worship services

JAMES H. STIRLING



"They said, 'Thank you very much for all the prayers.' In fact, one of the women said, 'We know that God... [will] protect us.'"

**A**mong Seventh-day Adventists around the world who watched on television the outbreak of war in Iraq during its first week, there was concern for their fellow believers in that country. The bombing of Baghdad, however, did not deter members of the local Adventist church from attending weekly worship services on that first Saturday, according to local sources. Michael Porter, president of the church in that region, reported to members of the Adventist News Network staff that the members were praying for peace. The headquarters of the church for that region are in Nicosia, Cyprus, a Mediterranean island south of Turkey and east of Syria, and it keeps in close contact with members.

"We can report, confirmed by a phone call to Baghdad, that our church members remain safe and met on Sabbath at our church as usual," said Porter. "The members are of good courage and expressed special thanks to the world church for the many prayers going up on their behalf." They worship in one of the largest and most architecturally striking churches in all of Iraq.

One church member in Baghdad was able to speak by telephone with a sister in Nicosia and said, "We're getting used to the bombing and know that God is in control. Don't worry too much about us." Porter reported that as of the end of the first week there had been no damage to the church or to members' homes.

The Baghdadi believers noted a very good attendance at that Sabbath worship, including visitors as well as regular members. "They were going to church because it's the same thing that was happening in 1991. We used to go to church every Sabbath," the member said.

Church members also expressed gratitude for the global prayer support exhibited during the current conflict.

"They said, 'Thank you very much for all the prayers.' In fact, one of the women said, 'We know that God...[will] protect us. And whatever happens, we know that he still loves us,'" Porter told Adventist NewsLine.

One contrast between the two conflicts is that, so

far in the first week, water, electricity and telephone lines remain open, where in 1991 electricity was turned off.

There are more than 200 Adventist members in Iraq, mostly in Baghdad. Organized in 1923, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iraq is one of the Christian churches among 13 denominations recognized by the government. There are three Adventist congregations in the country, including one in the city of Nineveh, famed for its visit by the reluctant biblical prophet Jonah.

Office personnel for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Middle East region, based in Cyprus, include several staff members whose families presently

Organized in 1923, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iraq is one of the Christian churches among 13 denominations recognized by the government.

live in Baghdad. Since the war began, the office family has prayed for God's intervention and protection in this most difficult time at their regular morning worship and again during a special prayer time at noon.

Homer Trecartin, secretary-treasurer for the Middle East region, says, "We thank God for his protection and for the dozens of e-mails from around the world, assuring us of prayers on our behalf."

Church members in Iraq are not the only Adventists affected by the conflict. Along with United States servicemen who are deployed, there are 20 Adventist chaplains serving in the war theater, according to Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries. ■

Source: Adventist News Network

*Editorial Note: As this issue of Adventist Today goes to press on April 2, 2003, this is all the information we have on the Adventist church in Baghdad. This article is meant to put a human face on Adventists in the Middle East and may or may not be up-to-date on the current happenings of the conflict.*



# When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?

REVIEWED BY ERVIN TAYLOR

**T**he leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist church has sent our denomination on a three-year odyssey in an effort to address a difficult set of problems. A symbol of one of the problems is that surveys have shown that a significant percentage of Adventist scientists and theologians can no longer accept as valid various elements of our church's traditional understandings and teachings concerning the Genesis narratives dealing with Creation and Noah's flood.

The "Faith and Science" conversations and consultations, which began in August 2002 in Ogden, Utah, will continue for North American Division scientists, theologians and church administrators at Glacier View, Colo., in August 2003. As this dialogue continues this year and concludes with an international conference in 2004, it might be helpful to examine how thoughtful scientists and theologians in other faith traditions have approached the general problem of the interface of science and religion. One of these thoughtful individuals is Ian Barbour, and he has written this book as a means of sharing his views on this topic.

Barbour obtained his B.A. at Swarthmore College (1943) and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago (1949), both in physics. After spending time as a student at the Yale Divinity School, he was appointed to teach both physics and religion at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., later becoming chair of the religion department. He is now the emeritus Bean Professor of Science, Technology, and Society at Carleton.

In this volume, Barbour employs a typology he introduced in his well-received *Religion in An Age of Science* (1990) "as an aid to sorting out the great variety of ways in which people have related science and religion" (1). Each chapter in *Science Meets Religion* uses this typology to organize his comments. The four ways are conflict, independence, dialogue and integration. He focuses primarily on the Christian tradition, arguing that reflections on science have been far more extensive there than in any other historic faith tradition. He examines a wide range of data and theoretical constructions used in astronomy, quantum physics, evolutionary biology, genetics and neuroscience, as well as the views of a wide range of theologians and scientists to illustrate the usefulness of his fourfold typology in "sorting out" various approaches to the relationship of science and religion. He believes that "dialogue and integration are more promising ways to bring scientific and religious insights together than is a conflict or independence mode" (179).

In conflict mode, science and religion are enemies. In Barbour's view, the conflict process is best exemplified in the biblical literalism of religious fundamentalists and in

the metaphysical materialism and naturalism of activist scientists, especially when considering evolutionary biology. "Biblical literalists believe that the theory of evolution conflicts with religious faith. They have promoted a prescientific cosmology as if it were an essential part of religious faith" (36). On the other hand, self-proclaimed atheistic scientists claim that scientific evidence for evolution is incompatible with any form of theism. "The two groups agree in asserting that a person cannot believe in both God and evolution" (2). Barbour argues that in making this statement, metaphysical naturalists ignore the wide theological spectrum within contemporary Christianity: "naturalism (including materialism), pantheism, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, traditionalism, conservatism, and biblical literalism (or fundamentalism)" (11).

In an aside, Barbour argues that a product of biblical literalism, "creation science," is a "threat to both religious and scientific freedom" (16). The efforts of lawyer Phillip Johnson and other supporters of the "intelligent design" or "irreducible complexity" movement such as Michael Behe have, Barbour argues, raised valid criticism of scientific materialism, but they proceed to attack evolutionary theory as itself inherently atheistic, a conclusion that Barbour rejects. He favorably quotes Pope John Paul II: "Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes."

In independence mode, science and religion are "strangers who can coexist as long as they keep a safe distance from each other" (2). Many evangelical, conservative and neo-orthodox Christians advocate this strategy. One version states that there is no conflict, because science and religion refer to different aspects of reality, use a different language system with distinctive rules, serve completely different functions, and ask contrasting questions. In this perspective, "science asks how things work and deals with objective facts; religion deals with values and ultimate meaning." This is the position taken by the National Academy of Sciences in dealing with creationism and by Stephen Jay Gould in his *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*. Another version claims that these two kinds of inquiry offer complementary perspectives on the world. "Conflict arises only when religious people make scientific claims, or when scientists go beyond their areas of expertise to promote naturalistic philosophies."

Ian G. Barbour.  
*When Science Meets  
Religion: Enemies,  
Strangers, or Partners?*  
San Francisco:  
Harper, 2000.

Continued on page 19



# Two Authorities, or One?

KENNETH RICHARDS

**W**hen I was a church school student in Glendale, Calif., a local preacher came to my class to talk about baptism. He made us all understand that, though there was no compulsion involved, it was really time we all took that important step. He seemed to assume that we were all Christians, or very nearly so.

He explained the basic doctrines of the church and reminded us of what Jesus said about getting baptized. Several of my classmates ended up in the local church baptism a few weeks later. But I was one of those who put it off. I thought I should carefully check out the teachings of the denomination, over time, before I joined it.

It was several years later that I decided the time had come to be baptized. My parents knew nothing about my decision. So when I was buried in baptism, in a pond full of ice water, at Cedar Falls in the San Bernardino Mountains, my father and mother were absent.

One of the things about the Seventh-day Adventist Church that had impressed me was its claim that all its doctrines could be proved from Scripture alone. The church manual plainly said that the Bible alone was our standard. I had heard people challenge the idea, saying there were other sources, so I discussed this matter more than once with my father, H. M. S. Richards Sr. Because he preached from the Bible and didn't use Ellen White's writings to validate doctrine, some thought he was robbing his audiences of a great blessing. But he knew the Spirit was quite capable of uplifting, reproving, guiding, strengthening, instructing and blessing his listeners through Bible preaching.

When I joined the Adventist church, it officially taught that the Bible is the "only" rule of faith and practice. But later it moved in a different direction.

While my father believed that the Bible was our only rule of faith and practice, he also believed Ellen White had been blessed with the gift of prophecy. However, when he preached in churches, halls, arenas and tents, and on the radio, he used Scripture to support what he taught. He advised me, when I began preaching, to study as many good sources as possible, including the writings of Ellen White. But he emphasized that the Bible was to be the main focus of a preacher's study. It was also to be the only book which, taken as a whole, validated a Christian minister's message.

I agreed with my father (and with many other students of the Bible) that nothing was to be substituted for Scripture in

presenting the gospel and other related truths. My theology and teaching ministry ought to find its authority in only one book—the one that came to us through the Spirit-inspired prophets and apostles—the only one which had come to be accepted as canonical.

So, when I first read, after being an Adventist minister for more than 20 years, of a particular official change in my denomination's view of Scripture, I was disappointed. At the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas, a new "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs" (consisting of a preamble and 27 paragraphs, each dealing with a particular doctrine) was voted.<sup>1</sup> The belief spelled out in item No. 1 had to do with the "Holy Scriptures." It upheld the Bible as the "written Word of God, given by divine inspiration." I liked that part. But it went on to call the Bible "the authoritative revealer of doctrines..." That was certainly true. But why didn't it say that the Bible was the only rule of faith and practice?

As I read more of the affirmations of belief, I came to item No. 17. Here, it seemed, I found why the word "only" was missing from item No. 1. The new statement on the "Gift of Prophecy" (No. 17) read: "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifest in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provided for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."<sup>2</sup> I had no problem with the writings of Ellen White being considered an "authoritative source of truth." But when I read the phrase declaring that "the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested," the absence of the word "only" before the word "standard" simply glared out at me. Had someone decided that since the writings of Ellen White were an "authoritative source of truth," we could no longer, with logical consistency, affirm that the Bible was our "only" rule of faith and practice? Could it be that now the denomination had decided to accept a two-tiered authority for faith and doctrine? I was not at all comfortable with the idea.

From time to time I find indications in Seventh-day Adventist literature that continue to feed that discomfort. For example, Richard M. Davidson, Professor of Old Testament at Andrews University, tells us that Scripture is the "final norm of truth."<sup>3</sup> If it is just "final," then it is not logically necessary to exclude at least one other authority (but one that is not "final") in establishing right religious beliefs and practices. One may then include Ellen White as an addi-



tional authority. Another indication that Adventists have more than one “norm” is provided by “The Authority of Scripture,” a discussion paper which was used (not voted) at the 1995 General Conference session. This paper affirms that “there are only two ways to find out God’s will and to state our doctrinal beliefs: (1) from special or supernatural revelation, which means the data first of all in Scripture and then in the writings of Ellen G. White, and (2) from general revelation, such as nature and human wisdom.”<sup>4</sup> The rest of this paragraph goes on to speak of the Scriptures as “the standard.” But such writing makes me wonder what’s going on, what’s really meant, what’s really believed among us and among our scholars!

I have this great concern: How can Seventh-day Adventists effectively carry out the Great Commission if we give the slightest impression that we have two (or more?) doctrinal authorities underlying the message we present to the world? How can those of us who live in “Christian” countries bring the writings of Ellen White into our pulpits (even as a lesser authority) for any of our statements regarding doctrine or Christian lifestyle? How can we invite friends or neighbors to attend our Sabbath School when it is so often immersed (as to study guides and discussion) in the statements of Ellen White? This can leave an impression that Ellen White’s writings are as authoritative as Scripture in determining what we believe. Am I wrong in saying that we should be known as the people of the Book—as a people who insist that what we teach as a Christian body must find its basis in one book only?

Not long ago in an *Adventist Review* article Jan Paulsen made the following statement: “The historic sanctuary message, based on Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen White, continues to be held to unequivocally. And the inspired authorities on which these and other doctrines are based, namely the Bible supported by the writings of Ellen White, continue to be the hermeneutical foundation on which we as a church place all matters of faith and conduct. Let no one think that there has been a change of position in regard to this.”<sup>5</sup>

If I do not misunderstand this statement, it says to me that now the Seventh-day Adventist church has not one but two inspired “authorities” on which its doctrines and rules of Christian conduct are ultimately grounded, namely, the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. If this is truly the present position of the church, it appears to me that we have changed our position<sup>6</sup> and are now trying to stand where we ought not.

When I joined the Adventist church it officially taught that the Bible is the “only” rule of faith and practice. But later it moved in a different direction. It seems we now have two means by which we can determine the contours of religious life. And not only that, it is also supposed that Adventist pastors and evangelists are to uphold and propagate this strange doctrine.<sup>7</sup> My conscience, of course, will not allow me to do this. On the matter of authority, I am much more comfortable with our statements of faith that came out before 1980. I am also comfortable with the thought that the Bible is our only creed.<sup>8</sup>

The double-authority doctrine cannot help but make being an Adventist more complicated. A good church member, as defined by the latest list of beliefs, cannot neglect to become a careful student not only of Scripture, but also of the numerous writings and manuscripts that Ellen White has written.<sup>9</sup> Also, evangelism must also become more complex and difficult. Now not only the Bible, but the writings of Ellen White, must be promoted and explained and expounded. The Bible can remain foremost, but her writings must be brought clearly into view, even if one sees them as being a secondary authority. It must be made clear that we have a two-tiered foundation for our Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Again, it seems to me that the double-authority doctrine complicates and weakens our evangelistic outreach. The results of this doctrine are already being manifested in many of our congregations. Let me offer an example: A pastor invites a minister who is a department head in a local conference to be a guest speaker in his church on a particular Sabbath. The subject is presented with sincerity, energy and earnestness. But it is basically a string-of-pearls sermon, and the pearls are quotations from the writings of Ellen White. In a few instances the pearls are connected by the phrase: “And please remember, this comes to us from the pen of inspiration.”

About halfway through the presentation, a family of four (all of them interested in the possibility of becoming members of the church) arise and quietly leave the sanctuary. They never return. It is learned later, through a relative of the family, that they were greatly perturbed because it appeared to them that Ellen White’s writings were our denomination’s authority in regard to Christian lifestyle.

Further, it may be mentioned that in our Sabbath Schools (at least in the U.S.) the authors of the study helps make fairly extensive use of Ellen White’s writings. Class members who rely on these quotations during their discussion of the lessons tend to use her as an authority for establishing spiritual truth. In some cases almost the whole Sabbath School study time is spent discussing what Ellen White has said. A non-Adventist observer of such activity might easily conclude that Adventists see her statements in the same way they see Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

When we accept the double-authority doctrine (or give the impression that we do so), we add to our theological workload and make it more difficult for us to explain ourselves to the world around us. I’m convinced we don’t need this burden. I hope that the Holy Spirit will influence our church representatives at the next General Conference quinquennial session to change our statement of beliefs to reflect the idea that the Bible alone is our rule.

As Seventh-day Adventists, let’s stick with Scripture as our only rule of faith and practice (leaving the anti-evangelistic double-authority position behind us). Then, since the Bible cannot exercise its authority unless it is interpreted properly, let us carefully consider how this ought to be done.<sup>11</sup> Such interpretation will go a long way to enable us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to present Christ to our world accurately and effectively. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is still being published, with minor changes, in our denomination’s yearbook and also in our church manual.

<sup>2</sup>All emphases in quotations are supplied.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. George W. Reid and Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 60.4. “The Authority of Scripture” in Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word; How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Berean, 1996), 346.

<sup>4</sup>Jan Paulsen, “The Theological Landscape: Perspectives on Issues Facing the World Seventh-day Adventist Church,” *Adventist Review*, NAD edition (October, 2002), 37.

<sup>5</sup>Before 1980 the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church agreed with James and Ellen White, early denominational leaders, that the Bible alone was to be our rule of faith and practice. Compare the *Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1942), 192; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), 204-205; *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 1:416; James White, *A Word to the Little Flock* (Gorham, ME: James White, 1847), 13. Paulsen, 36-37.

<sup>6</sup>See the first paragraph (preamble) of “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1998* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1998), 5.

<sup>7</sup>This is a formidable task, because “the material that she wrote fills more than 80 books, 200 tracts and pamphlets, and 4600 periodical articles. Sermons, diaries, special testimonies, and letters comprise another 60,000 pages of manuscript materials.” [P. Gerard Damsteeg], *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 226.

<sup>8</sup>See also Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938), 84.

<sup>9</sup>Both authority and hermeneutics are properly understood as of crucial importance by George F. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, M.D.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 192. “The question of authority has been central to Adventism through all its developmental stages and will continue to be so until the eschaton. If the devil triumphs on the issue of authority he wins the entire game. Thus Adventism’s position on authority and the principles of interpretation will determine its future.”



# Reinventing Adventists

## HOW ADVENTIST HISTORIANS TRANSFORMED

CIRO SEPULVEDA

**I**n the late 1840s and early 1850s, Sabbath-keeping itinerant preachers journeyed through small towns in New England and the American frontier carrying a carpetbag full of pamphlets, books and charts, one of which showed a two-horned beast, taken from Revelation 13. This ugly and evil monster, according to the itinerants, was the government of the United States. Today the two-horned beast has all but disappeared from Adventist literature and preaching. The antigovernment stance has changed; most Adventists here now see their government as the most democratic and freedom-loving nation on the planet.

The 19th-century identity of the early Adventist founders, who stood in firm opposition to the culture, has vanished. By the second or third decade of the 20th century, Adventists grew very comfortable soaking up the national mythology and being assimilated into the cultural mainstream of the nation. The change from a radical Christian community to one of conservative Christians surfaced noticeably in the historiography of the church by the second decade of the 20th century and helped construct a new Adventist identity. By the end of the 20th century, Adventist historians succeeded in reinventing the past, helping to place Adventist roots and identity in the cradle of the national experience. They did so by reacting to the changes within the Adventist community, particularly by identifying the church and its leaders with “hardy New England stock” and the Puritan ethic.

### Seventh-day Adventists and Puritans

The early Adventists were quite different from the Puritans, who, coming from England, at their core were Anglicans. Their outward structure remained unchanged except that they became Congregationalists, a type of Anglicanism. Congregationalists boasted of a highly trained clergy, with graduates from Oxford and Cambridge, and they nurtured a well-reasoned theology which they laid out in many books and treatises. They valued education and established free schools for townships of 50 or more residents.

In contrast to these colonial Puritans, the early Seventh-day Adventists treated book learning as an unnecessary luxury. Most Adventist leaders had little if any formal education, and only a couple of the founding leaders had attended a college or university, without graduating.

The two groups were also very different in terms of religious expression. The Puritans founded rural churches, with most of their congregants scattered throughout New

England on farms and in small villages. By and large the Puritans were farmers, convinced that the Lord had chosen them to establish a new society free of all of the vices that plagued the church in England. Their worship was formal and rigid, and it followed long-established norms and patterns. Emotions did not cloud Puritan thinking. They took pride in being a cerebral people, guided by principles and not by feelings.

The Adventists, on the other hand, wanted Jesus to come and rescue them from a world totally corrupt and beyond redemption. Seventh-day Adventists emerged on the frontier and quickly moved to cities, into a world of factories and tenement houses where the poor did not get enough to eat but lived in illness and poverty. The Puritans left their farms on Sundays and worshiped in well-constructed edifices where religion became a complex and highly intellectualized affair. The Adventists lived in cities, worshiped in private homes, and took their inspiration from visions, testimonies, lively songs, camp meetings and pamphlets. For Adventists, religion was an affair of the heart, not of the intellect.

The Puritans and the Adventists also came from different social classes, Puritans from the middle class and Adventists from the working class. As J. N. Loughborough, who wrote one of the first histories of the Adventist church, states in the last pages of his book, *The Great Second Advent Movement*, “We have shown how from obscurity and poverty, this message has advanced with accelerated force and power.”

Ellen and James White, two of the three most prominent founders of the church, provide a good example of the social class that gave birth to it. Originally from Maine, they belonged to a charismatic group whose leader was once put into jail for being critical of the established churches in Portland. Poverty forced the Whites from Portland to Connecticut. In Connecticut they could not earn enough to live on, so they moved to N.Y., then back to Maine and again to N.Y., hoping to find better grounds for survival. From Saratoga, New York, they again fled to Rochester, New York, and from there to Battle Creek, Mich.

Like the Whites, most Seventh-day Adventists in the 19th century were displaced people. Many who became Adventists had migrated or immigrated because of the oppressive conditions created by the Industrial Revolution in the United States or the revolutions in Europe. The Puritans were ideological reformers, the Seventh-day Adventists economic refugees.

The values of the Puritans were also radically different

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# History:

## ADVENTIST HERITAGE

from those of the Seventh-day Adventists. The Puritans were about the business of founding a perfect society, creating institutions and imposing their values on the world around them. They wanted to prosper and show the world the model society. It did not take them long to discover that slavery could enrich and strengthen their new society.

In contrast, Seventh-day Adventists possessed no desire to found a “city set on a hill,” but rather hoped for the imminent return of Jesus so they could abandon the society full of corruption and injustice in which they lived. They considered the United States to be the two-horned beast of Revelation 13, a demonic power in collusion with forces of evil. The words of Joseph Bates in the early days of the movement clearly state how the Adventists felt about the society in which they lived: “Then I suppose we shall begin to think (if not before) that the third woe has come upon this nation, this boasted land of liberty, this heaven-daring, soul destroying, slave holding, neighbor

law, and copy out the part that we make use of to show the dragon voice from the dragon mouth of the two horn beast, showing how it makes us all slave catchers under penalty of 1,000 dollars fine or six months imprisonment.”

The Adventist past and the Puritan past had little in common. Adventist historians faced a great obstacle in their effort to merge the two experiences.

### The Adventist Worldview, 19th Century

A primary element at the core of the 19th-century Adventist worldview was the idea that the world is a corrupt place full of injustice, with no hope for improvement. The first Adventist communities developed a deep, burning hope that Jesus would return and liberate them. Adventist distrust of the culture was geared toward not only public or civic authorities but also the religious hierarchies. This profound distrust surfaced clearly in the experiences of James and Ellen White immediately after the disappointment of 1844. They belonged to an Adventist community in Maine that in the opinion of many of the respected citizens of the city of Portland exemplified strange and aberrant behavior. Even other Adventists looked at the Portland group as suspect. Joshua Himes, chief promoter of the Advent movement, in writing to William Miller, stated that the believers in Portland are in a “bad way.”

A second tenet of the early Adventist worldview held that Adventists were part of a kingdom more powerful and influential than the governments of the world—the

Ellen White played a central role in encouraging the members of the movement to keep their hopes up, to look toward the future, to be of good cheer. Her articles and books became central to a forward-looking spirit.

murdering country.”

Adventists were suspicious not only of the nation as a whole but also of its leaders, whom they considered hypocritical. They spent no energy trying to reform the world around them because they saw it as totally corrupt. They took seriously the biblical claim that all humans were the children of one God. John Byington, first president of the General Conference, not only welcomed Blacks and Indians into his home in Vermont but also helped many fugitive slaves escape to freedom. He had left the Methodist church when it became clear that they would continue to support slavery. And John Preston Kellogg, father of the doctor and cereal maker, ran an underground railroad station on their farm in southern Michigan.

The distaste that Sabbath-keeping Adventists harbored for the nation led them to advocate civil disobedience. Many Adventists were willing to go to jail before obeying the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which required Americans to return runaway slaves to their masters. J. B. Frisbie commented on this law in the *Review and Herald* in 1860: “We have been accused of not quoting this law correctly. We have therefore taken pains to procure the

kingdom of God. Belonging to this kingdom gave them identity. They were not at all discouraged by injustice, oppression or the evils of the world, because they were convinced that soon, very soon, their kingdom would take control. Their teaching assured them that Jesus at his second coming would usher in the divine kingdom, and the Sabbath was a sign that they indeed were part of that kingdom. Ellen White played a central role in encouraging the members of the movement to keep their hopes up, to look toward the future, to be of good cheer. Her articles and books became central to a forward-looking spirit. Her tone and voice are clearly seen in the first articles of the *Present Truth*. In September of 1849 she writes, “In this time of trial, we need to be encouraged and comforted by each other.” She goes on to say, “God has shown me that He gave His people a bitter cup to drink, to purify and cleanse them. It is a bitter draught, and they can make it still more bitter by murmuring, complaining, and repining.”

A third tenet of the Adventist worldview was the notion that they were to identify with the victims of injustice.

Continued on page 14



# Reinventing Adventist History

Continued from page 13

They were not to separate from the world or run away from it, nor to reform it, but rather to be about the business of helping victimized people. It is in this context that Adventists established sanitariums, schools, city missions, orphanages, vegetarian restaurants, and bakeries and sold books. Their institutions were not intended to increase profits and make money for investors; they were simply designed to educate, heal, and aid the weak, the poor and the victimized.

And a fourth tenet of their worldview was their conviction that the kingdom of God is advanced through service and love, not might, force, politics or violence. Reforms, in the thinking of the early Adventists, were of no use. By and large, Adventists did not belong to national temperance movements, suffrage movements or any other reform movement of the times. They regarded these as but a superficial bandage. Unselfish, disinterested love lay at the heart of the way Adventists were to behave.

By World War I Adventists had dropped their revolutionary stance and worldview and turned into cooperative, mild reformers fitting comfortably in society.

## Adventist Historiography

The early Adventists saw themselves as a remnant apocalyptic community. Loughborough did not see the Adventist movement as part of a historical continuum, but rather as a movement that came out of the lower classes in response to apocalyptic prophecies. The mission of the movement was to proclaim the end time. In *The Great Second Advent Movement*, published in 1905, Loughborough touched on the Garden of Eden, the time of Jesus, the signs of the imminent second coming, then the developments in the church from the middle to the end of the 19th century [32]. He gave no space to the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation or Colonial America. A similar approach was used by Matilda Erickson Andross in 1926 in a history for young people, sponsored by the General Conference, *Story of the Advent Movement*.

Clearly the early Adventists did not see the history of the Adventist church as part of a Puritan or European tradition. They were modern-day prophets in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. In other words, Adventists believed that they were part of a preordained divine plan that was clearly outlined in the books of Daniel and Revelation. In the apocalyptic literature they found their origins. They were not reformers, but rather a prophetic people about to witness the destruction of all human institutions.

The church's desire to identify with full-blooded Puri-

tans apparently surfaced after the death of Ellen White in 1915, when the children of the German and Scandinavian immigrants who had entered the church in the second half of the 19th century began to take leadership positions. Even by the 1890s their presence was so influential that they elected the first immigrant General Conference president, O. A. Olsen, born in Norway but brought to the United States by his parents.

By the second decade of the 20th century, a deep-seated hatred in American society toward anything German or foreign forced Adventist leaders to reevaluate their identity. In Collinsville, Ill., a mob of 500 people lynched a German immigrant, and the local courts exonerated the mob's leaders. In Iowa a politician announced that 90 percent of all men and women who taught the German language were traitors. Anyone who sympathized with the Germans during World War I became a victim of severe discrimination. Thousands of people with German last names changed their names for the purpose of survival, and they tried to hide their German roots. These changing values in American society led to a change in Adventist identity.

Mahlon Elsworth Olsen's book *Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* became the standard history text for the church in the late 1920s and 1930s. The book, published in 1925, mirrored the changes that were taking place in Adventist identity and historiography. Olsen was the son of O. A. Olsen. The introduction to Olsen's book contains a section of almost 20 pages on the history of the Christian church in northern Europe, with 12 illustrations in which Martin Luther plays a prominent role. The following section, "Later Reformers," provides the history of English and Puritan reformers. An illustration of the Mayflower arriving in Massachusetts and a group of Puritans worshiping on the deck of the Mayflower before landing appeared in that section.

Olsen's book demonstrated that Seventh-day Adventists were slowly drifting away from the countercultural prophetic identity of the 19th century. By the third decade of the 20th century, they were no longer swimming against the current but rather quite comfortably flowing in the national culture. By World War I Adventists had dropped their revolutionary stance and worldview and turned into cooperative, mild reformers fitting comfortably in society.

By the middle of the century, when Le Roy Edwin Froom published his four-volume work, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, it became evident that Adventists had shed all of the 19th-century heritage and were now comfortable with a new Puritan identity. Froom's third voluminous tome was wholly dedicated to the Puritan roots of Adventist history. The section entitled "Prophecy's Key Place in Colonial American Thought" goes to great lengths to demonstrate how Adventist theology is firmly grounded in the works of the Puritan divines.



The new historiography reflected the accommodating style and identity that the Adventist church had embraced by the middle of the 20th century. When the United States Army created a program to develop germ weapons in the 1950s and solicited the aid of the Adventist church in procuring human guinea pigs, the General Conference was more than willing to abide. Between 1954 and 1973, about 2,300 Seventh-day Adventist young men volunteered at the request of the General Conference Medical Department. In the words of Dr. Theodore R. Flaiz: "We feel that if anyone should recognize the debt of loyalty and service for the many courtesies and considerations received from the Department of Defense, we, as Adventists, are in a position to feel a debt of gratitude for these kind considerations."

The shift in identity that surfaces in the 1950s is clearly found in A. W. Spalding's *Origin and History of Seventh-Day Adventists*, published in 1961. This three-volume history graphically illustrates the radical changes that had taken place. The wild, hideous boar that had appeared in the early Adventist evangelistic literature had been transformed. In Spalding's history, the two-horned beast surfaces again, but this time as a tame American buffalo. Most of the illustrations in Spalding's book characterize the Adventist founders as proper Bostonians wearing well-tailored suits, with carefully groomed facial hair and the pleasant smiles of a people who could neatly fit into the world of the TV program *Leave It to Beaver*.

In the early 1970s, Adventist historians pulled off an admirable feat when they received the blessing of the academics. A Loma Linda history professor arranged a meeting with some of the most respected historians of the American religious experience, inviting them to present papers at Loma Linda University. This landmark meeting signaled that Adventists were no longer a cult but had finally entered the ranks of the denominations. One of the Adventist historians, commenting on Ellen White, suggested that "Mrs. White, once the lioness on racial issues, encouraged discretion to the point of racial separation so that the 'gospel' would not be impeded among white southerners." In the early Adventist histories, Ellen White had been painted as a radical abolitionist. Now, in the revised histories of the 20th century and the compilations made from her writings and letters, she surfaced sitting comfortably in the company of segregationists.

The reinventing of Adventist history became even more evident in the 1980s, when a group of Adventist historians produced a book entitled *The World of Ellen G. White*. In fourteen chapters they described American society in the 19th century from the perspective of an Adventist scholar. However, in the introduction they were quick to point out "Ellen White is not the subject of this volume; hence she appears only occasionally in these pages." In the text it is evident they preferred to skirt the problem of placing Ellen White in the society in which she lived. Clearly they wanted to document the history of their church but were uncomfortable with the female prophet and the many thorny issues her presence raised.

Articles in *Spectrum*, *Adventist Heritage*, and other Adventist journals on the church's history in the second half of the century clearly supported the trend. In 1976 Ronald D. Graybill set forth the notion that a "new Adventist history" was in the making. He argued that the early historians, J. N. Loughborough and James White, wrote providential history, and that Nichols and Froom, in the middle of the century, produced apologetic history. However, with the advent of young Adventist historians with Ph.D. degrees from prestigious American universities, the historiography of the church was about to produce the "real stuff." In his words: "Those who write this history should strive to make Adventist history useful and credible to non Adventist scholars."

At the end of the century, the works of the popular church historian George Knight clearly reflected the trend in Adventist historiography. His last book, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, starts by stating that if the founders of the church were to be brought back to life today, they would not be given membership in the Adventist community. Using theological categories and sidestepping social and economic categories, Knight argues that the Adventist church dramatically changed its identity. He also makes a case for the notion that the early founders would have approved because they believed in what he terms "a dynamic concept of the present truth."

### Conclusion

Adventist historiography passed through several stages as it evolved from the 19th century to the beginning of the twenty-first. Later generations with a burning desire to become "respectable" or "centered" aided the process of pushing the church into the mainstream. The church's ability to build successful institutions and become closely linked to the interests and values of the larger society contributed to the ongoing efforts to merge with the dominant culture. And the fact that in the United States a portion of the membership, and especially the leadership, of the church made the transition from the working class to the middle class added momentum to the process.

In summary, the historiography of the Adventist church helped create a new identity for the modern Adventist, no longer burdened by the troublesome baggage or worldview of the early founders, and no longer seeing the government as an evil beast in collusion with satanic powers. They no longer pressed to proclaim the second coming of Jesus because the world, after all, is not that bad. Unlike the Adventists of the middle 19th century who saw the nation as a warmongering two-horned beast, the modern Adventist feels very comfortable embracing the values and culture of the nation and its never-ending search for power and dominance.

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If the founders of the church were to be brought back to life today, they would not be given membership in the Adventist community.



# ADVENTISTS and genetically modified foods

CLIVE HOLLAND



**“Y**ou are what you eat.” Arguably, there is no group of people who place more value and emphasis on this saying than Seventh-day Adventists. Most of them believe strongly in healthful eating, and many choose vegetarianism and noncaffeinated drinks, while eschewing all alcoholic beverages. They’ve had good guidance in the value of watchful food intake and regularity in meal times. From the earliest days of the church they have been admonished to eat vegetables and whole grains in order to enhance clarity of mind and strength of body. God directed Adam and Eve to choose their foods from “every plant on the surface of the earth and fruit-yielding tree” (Gen 1:29). Ellen White advised them to select the choicest and best foods in the land (*Ministry of Healing*, 295-300). Regular church programs and weekly homilies have ingrained into the very being of Adventism the need for people to place only the best foods in their bodies because they are the temple of God.

How then are Adventists now to view foods from plants that have been genetically modified? Since they do not find statements from the Bible or Ellen White on this, many find this the source of a growing dilemma. Are these foods safe? Does the church approve? Do these foods

ter ways of improving crops beyond simply saving some seeds while discarding others. As researchers learned more about plant reproduction, they began to crossbreed only those plants with desirable traits. When they discovered that genes carry traits from one generation to the next they could make crossbreeding more predictable and thus improve crops even more. Eventually they learned techniques for crossbreeding plants of different species, which allowed for even greater crop improvement.

Modern biotechnology is only the latest chapter in thousands of years of genetically improving crop plants, but it now does so with more precise methods. It permits researchers to take a single gene with a known function in one plant and transfer it into other existing crop varieties. In contrast, crossbreeding transfers thousands of genes of unknown functions from one plant into others. The methods of biotechnology extend the century-old process of circumventing natural reproductive barriers. Additionally, biotechnology techniques allow researchers to access a wider range of genetic diversity to improve crops.

As an Adventist scientist I am often surprised at the walls people build around themselves to avoid learning a truth, or even something new. In my responsibilities with a plant genetics company, I am regularly cast in the role of spokesperson for the burgeoning technology of genetic

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meet biblical standards for healthful living? Will people get sick if they eat genes and DNA from these new plants? The fear of the unknown was expressed eloquently by a dear soul who raised her gnarled finger in my direction and proudly declared, “I’ve never eaten a gene in my life, and I won’t start with any from those new-fangled plants you are making.”

Actually, the genetic makeup of crops has been changing and improving for many centuries. Our ancestors initiated the process of crop improvement as they domesticated plants by selectively planting seeds only from plants with desirable traits. Specifically, during the past 150 years, continual scientific progress has provided bet-

modification (GM) of plants. The explanation is easy for me, and it can be fairly straightforward. I find it difficult to get someone with a closed mind to listen, if not impossible. “The risks,” I’m told, “are not worth experimenting with the food we eat.” Others add, “They haven’t been tested long enough for anyone to know if they are safe.” “We need 100 percent certainty of safety,” is the cry of the ardent in their opposition to something they can’t explain. What some call the “precautionary principle” requires absolute certainty of safety, without a single element of risk involved, and there are over 20 versions of it.

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automobile with the benefits of reaching our destinations. We balance the risks of mobile phones with convenience they bring to our lives, and we balance the risks of using electricity with so many labor-saving benefits. Absolutely nothing in life is risk-free, and it is unreasonable to hold any technology to such a standard. The problem for consumers in evaluating genetically modified plants is that the technology is relatively new, and many are not able to judge from experience how risky it is.

It was the same when trains first started running. People worried that train travel might cause illness because it was not natural to travel at 20 miles per hour. It happened with pasteurization as well. People thought it would remove goodness from food. Initially, vaccines created even greater consternation, but now they are an expected part

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of our lives. Other technology inventions, such as the automobile, prompted extreme concerns for safety and health when first introduced. Many wondered if cars were even needed when horses did everything so adequately.

The irony in all this is that GM foods are more extensively tested than ordinary foods. They are rigorously controlled and vetted by government experts after extended testing and validation of safety by the developers, while regular foodstuffs largely go unchallenged. Generally, the time needed to market any GM plant is four to six years longer than a conventional product because of the extra testing required.

So what is genetic modification of plants? All characteristics of living organisms are passed on from one generation to the next through the combined genes within chromosomes from each parent. Genes are known as the building blocks, where special codes are contained for making new offspring, plant or animal. Much has been outlined in the public press in recent months, with scientists completing the human genome and the corn genome and the rice genome, along with those of several other plants. The genome of any living organism is simply a map, showing where genes are located and what they are made up of. Genes are precise combinations of minute chemical blocks, ordered in such a way as to be entirely unique. It is the rearranging, deletion or insertion of genes that is known as genetic engineering, or more commonly, genetic modification.

Many people are especially disturbed about trans-species gene transfer. Adventists and others gasp when they hear the fabled story of fish genes being used in tomatoes and strawberries to develop cold tolerance. One individual, in all sincerity, accused me of meddling with

God’s creation and wanted to know how my conscience could handle that. “Tampering with the basis of life” is one of the most common objections I hear from people concerned over a science they so poorly understand. When people are told that in humans half their genes are just like those in a banana, they get little consolation. The building blocks in the plant kingdom have significant similarities between many species, and it is because of this genetical alikeness that GM works as well as it does.

It is true, science can now use gene-splicing technology to actually combine genetic elements of two or more living cells. For example, we can cause bacterial cells to produce molecules also found in humans. Cows can be made to produce more milk from the same amount of feed. And we can synthesize therapeutic molecules that have never before existed. In addition, genes from species can be produced artificially in the laboratory. Once the genome of a species is mapped, the makeup of its genes is also known, and these can be artificially synthesized. We can then take these pieces of genetic messaging and insert them into a different organism. Scientists have been slow to adapt in their way of communicating this to the public. For example, when they say, “human genes are transferred into cattle embryos for cystic fibrosis cure,” or “fish genes bring cold tolerance to tomatoes,” they could say more accurately and with less confusion that “the function of these genes has been determined from various species; then synthetic copies have been made.” Thus it would be better in the case of cattle and tomatoes to say, “Protein-enhancing modification has been added to cattle embryos, in search of a cure for cystic fibrosis,” or “a cold-tolerance gene has been transferred into tomatoes.”

We humans are likely to be uncomfortable with the thought that genes from fish or hogs or weeds may end up as part of our food chain. Today the boundaries of GM foods are blurred more because of the aggressive medical research being conducted for the production of new organs, prevention of disease and other deformity cures. People are further confounded in their understanding of GM foods by the relatively new efforts of researchers to create medications within plants, dubbed biopharming. Several crops are now under test for delivery of basic medications. For example, a person with diabetes may be able to follow a specific diet that provides required daily insulin needs, without the need for tablets or injections. But if people are to engage in dialogue on the subject and accept these new GM foods, they must gain a basic understanding of gene transfer technology.

In 1990, a genetically modified protein contained in rennet was released for use by commercial cheese makers. The process of cheese-making requires that fresh milk be curdled. This has been done for centuries by extracting from newborn calves the natural rennet found in their stomachs. In times of shortage, a similar protein has also been taken from hogs. To do this, the newborn is slaughtered and the rennet harvested. Purity, diseases and

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**Continued on page 18**



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Continued from page 17

consistency have been continuing concerns with this natural source of rennet. Today, however, over 80 percent of cheese manufactured worldwide is curdled with a genetically modified protease. With this, consistency and purity are extremely stable and the specter of disease transfer almost

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nonexistent.

It was the Flavr Savr tomato in 1994 that became the second commercial GM food product available on supermarket shelves. This was genetically modified to grow on the vine longer, develop more intense flavor and ship long distances without spoiling. The following from the developer's brochure explains this new tomato:

"First, we made a copy of a gene which causes softening of tomatoes. Then we put this copy into the plant backwards to slow down the softening gene. Simple enough, but we have to know if this step was successful. So we attached a gene, which makes a naturally occurring protein. This protein makes Flavr Savr seeds resistant to the kanamycin contained in our test medium. Now, the results become very easy to read. Those seeds unaffected by the kanamycin carry the reversed gene and will be planted for tomato production. No kanamycin is present in tomatoes grown from Flavr Savr seeds."

Over the past 50 years, breeders conducting conventional plant breeding have utilized a technology called mutagenesis to gain new plant variants. Considered by many to be an early form of biotechnology, this technique uses one of several methods to scramble genes in a cell, with resulting calluses grown out into plants of serendipity. With this technique, many stellar food-crop developments have been produced. The downside is that all new plants were by chance, without any managed order. Often undesirable traits were transferred into the new plants, requiring many years of backcrossing to remove these. It is the preciseness offered by genetic modification that is providing so many opportunities for the development of more healthy and nutritious foods.

Nearly all GM plant advances today are providing significant advantages in the production of the food crop, with little benefit, if any, to the end consumer. For example, corn has been genetically modified to resist a major insect pest called European corn borer. To successfully grow corn in

much of North America, farmers in the past have made several applications of potent insecticides to their crop every summer. To overcome this pest, scientists inserted into corn cells a gene from a simple soil bacterium called *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or Bt for short. Within the corn plant, this acts very much like an insecticide by disrupting the stomach functions of specific bugs that bite into the plant. Interestingly, this same soil bacterium has been recognized and used by organic growers for many years as one of their most effective spray controls for crop pests. This is truly advantageous for farmers, in savings on chemical input costs and reduced health hazards in fewer chemicals handled. However, little benefit is passed to the final consumer, and until this happens many will continue to question if the risks of a new science are what they want to be exposed to.

Today it is estimated that 70 percent of regular foodstuffs consumed by Americans contain some portion of GM plants. The first of these foods was made available in quantity, beginning in 1996, and it has been widely consumed for almost seven years now. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated that not one substantiated case of sickness or death is documented from eating food with genetically modified components. This statement was positioned before Congress in the discussion of irradiating food, where it was disclosed that in the United States almost 5,000 people die from food *E. coli* poisoning each year.

The second wave of GM plants now being developed is expected to bring significant benefits to the end consumer. Golden rice, so named because of its golden color from the insertion of genes from the daffodil plant, holds much promise for those in the developing world. Producing elevated levels of beta-carotene, a precursor to vitamin A, it is believed this rice will help alleviate deficiencies that can lead to blindness. Also included in this rice are genes for increased iron availability, which will help reduce anemia, particularly among women in the developing world. A tomato which has three times the usual quantity of lycopene, an antioxidant believed to help fight cancer, is currently undergoing field testing. Sweet potatoes that can ward off a devastating plant virus, bananas and potatoes that contain a vaccine for a human virus associated with cervical cancer, along with food products that will stay fresh for extended periods are under development. Just around the corner are crops with more vitamins, more antioxidants and minerals, and with fewer allergens. These are but a few examples of GM products under development, along with many field crops being modified to thrive in extreme climates of drought, excess moisture and saline soils.

More and more, biotechnology is moving toward products that will offer direct benefits to consumers, such as



improved nutrient profiles and enhanced tastes. A gene that produces a plant hormone that counteracts aging and keeps fruits and vegetables fresh longer was recently discovered by researchers at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Hepatitis B vaccine has been included in bananas and tomatoes, with the potential of bringing cures to millions in developing countries.

Are GM foodstuffs safe to eat? Different GM organisms include different genes inserted in different ways. This means that individual GM foods and their safety need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis and it is not possible or wise to make general statements on the safety of all potential GM foods. Those currently available on the international market have passed rigorous risk assessments and are not considered likely to present risks for human health. In addition, no effects on human health have been shown as a result of the consumption of such foods by the general population in the countries where these have been approved. Continuous use of risk assessments based on the Codex Principles and, where appropriate, including post-market monitoring, should form the basis for evaluating the longer-term safety of GM foods. From my scientific vantage, I see GM foods becoming safer and posing far less risk. Allergenicity is tested against all known possibilities, deadly aflatoxins reduced on grain crops modified to control insect invasions, and many other tests for potential diseases and contaminants are scrutinized in specific detail.

Are GM foods acceptable to the Adventist church? As with many political and sociological issues in our society, our church is astutely silent. As a denomination we are forerunners in the medical field. How would it have been if church leaders 15 or 20 years ago had strongly opposed organ transplantation? Many members were expecting this, and some even demanded our church take a stand against such acts. Today organ transplanting is no longer an issue, with Adventist institutions renowned worldwide for skilled expertise in this arena. Tremendous benefits have been achieved and human suffering alleviated. The church I belong to encourages thoughtfulness and study. It accepts the power of choice given to humanity at creation. It encourages and accepts the wisdom of minds to discern good from bad. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is far more dangerous to eat a hamburger that could be contaminated with E. Coli than to eat any GM foodstuff available today. Neither vegetarianism nor avoidance of GM foods is mandated by my church. As a scientist blessed to be alive in this exciting period and involved in the intricacies of adapting plants for greater benefits, I would not want it any other way. The church cannot mandate, and it must not. Is it healthy, does it prolong life, are there known risks associated with it? These are questions discerning individuals must answer for themselves, based on rational and intelligent evaluation of the known facts. "Science opens new wonders to our view; she soars high and explores new depths; but she brings nothing from her research that conflicts with divine revelation" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 115). ■

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## Book review

Continued from page 9

In dialogue mode, science and religion can compare their methods of acquiring knowledge about the world even as they acknowledge their differences in how they approach reality and their language of discourse. Dialogue is possible, for example, in developing models and using analogies in imaging what cannot be directly observed—for example, God or a subatomic particle. Alternatively, dialogue can occur when science consciously raises a question that is known to be beyond its boundaries, such as why is the universe orderly and intelligible? Barbour quotes the comments of Catholic theologian David Tracy, who holds that religious questions arise at the horizons or "limit-situations" of human experience (24).

In integration mode, a systematic and extensive partnership between science and religion would occur. Natural theology, from Thomas Aquinas to Richard Swinburne, has sought in nature alone or by human reason alone a proof of the existence of God. Barbour agrees that natural theology has a great appeal in a world of religious pluralism. However, he suggests that "taken alone it can at best lead only to the God of deism" (30). Other authors develop what Barbour calls a more promising "theology of nature" by beginning with a given faith tradition and arguing that some of its beliefs should be reformulated in the light of scientifically based knowledge. For example, for Arthur Peacocke, the starting point of theological reflection is "past and present religious experience in an ongoing religious community. Religious beliefs are tested by community consensus and by the criteria of coherence, comprehensiveness, and fruitfulness" (31).

Barbour notes that others have offered different typologies. For example, Ted Peters proposed a more elaborate classification which splits Barbour's "Conflict" category into Scientism, Scientific Creationism, and Ecclesiastical Authoritarianism. Still others claim that the interactions vary too much among different historical periods and scientific disciplines to warrant our employing any general schematic arrangement. Barbour agrees that the relations between science and religion are complex, but he argues that each of his four basic types can be found in each century since the rise of modern science and in each of the sciences.

In his conclusion, Barbour notes that "all models are limited and partial and none gives a complete or adequate picture of reality." Nevertheless, he offers his own views as to what approaches he finds most helpful in considering when science meets religion (79-80).

His confessional statements should be considered seriously as offering appropriate models and suggestions that might be taken up by the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist faith community as it attempts to move beyond its fundamentalist past in explaining God's relationship to the created world. ■



# Should **ADVENTIST** Doctrine Be Logical?

JOE GREIG

**A**t a recent potluck dinner I attended, someone raised a question about applying critical methods, logic in particular, to the exposition and defense of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. Others at the table, however, feared that examining statements of faith by critical methods would ultimately destroy faith and with it the church, the repository of faith. But I disagreed.

## The Appeal of Being Rational

One who uses deductive logic may expect that if he or she uses only true premises the conclusion of the argument will be certain. Such an argument is considered both valid and sound. One who uses inductive logic, on the other hand, on the basis of observations or claims, can expect only probability, not certainty. Such arguments are considered to be either strong or weak, rather than sound or unsound.

## Rationality and Assumptions

All argumentation rests on assumptions. To a person who is committed to one assumption a given argument will seem logical, but not so to one who denies that assumption. Any argument rests on assumptions, presuppositions, or axioms, and these axioms may be considered so obvious that they do not need proof, or they are true by definition. For instance, most people would assume that their personal experience is reliable, unless someone else could present them with evidence that they lacked sufficient information, they were hallucinating, or their predispositions colored their experience in one way or another, so that they are brought to doubt the reliability of some aspects of that experience.

While our assumptions sometimes lead our reasoning astray, logic by its rules insists that we test our presuppositions as far as possible, thus protecting us from arguing from unwarranted assumptions. This procedure may involve the results of other critical methodologies (for example, science or the historical critical method). Admittedly, critical methodologies also rest on assumptions but critical thinking demands that every assumption should be scrutinized, even its own. Sometimes a person may abandon one assumption in favor of another, on the grounds of an intellectual risk factor. Few alive today would risk affirming that the earth is flat.

The rules of logic help us avoid false reasoning and logical fallacies. Consider the statement: "The Bible is authoritative because it is the inspired word of God."

Defending this statement usually results in cyclical reasoning. The authority of the Bible is based on its divine inspiration, and the claim for divine inspiration is based on the Bible's authority. This type of reasoning is considered fallacious because it fails to give a substantive reason for why the Bible's authority is equated with its inspiration. But, by introducing critical data from both within and without the Bible, we can test the assumptions behind this argument.

Because critical thinkers admit that their methods rest on assumptions, some conservative Christians argue that as a presupposition, our belief in the infallibility of the Bible is logically as legitimate (or more so) for understanding the world as is the scientific method, which by its own admission ultimately cannot prove reality. They also argue that because all arguments are ultimately cyclical (coming back to their assumptions), it is as valid (or more so) to stand on the literal statements of an infallible Bible as to presuppose the competency of reason or of critical methods in the quest for truth. Therefore, such people reject outright any kind of critical analysis of what are considered these infallible biblical teachings formulated into doctrines.

One sometimes hears the advice, "trust your compass," meaning, "trust your Bible; do not trust your reason or your senses." If one wishes to argue for a young earth, a literal seven-day creation and a worldwide flood, he may affirm these because of his presupposition that the Bible is an infallible authority for interpreting geological data. In doing so he may suppress or reject all scientific and experiential data on the grounds of this assumption.

Critical thinkers would counter that while all arguments come back to assumptions, not all arguments are equally rigorous in their analysis of what is claimed for the assumptions. In rigorous argumentation, we should take history and science seriously and integrate it with theology, unless we believe the world is an illusion. Some arguments are based on a narrow field of knowledge, not taking into consideration everything we know. These are weaker arguments than those which incorporate larger amounts of data. People using these arguments sometimes try to avoid what is the case, or what seem to be actual states of the world based on historical and scientific analysis. Thus, when people expand their field of knowledge they can modify or change their theological assumptions in ways similar to those that moved most people away from assuming the world was flat to affirming it is a sphere. We may simply refer to this as the power of the emerging picture to persuade or coerce us into changing our mind.



Admittedly, we cannot avoid cyclical reasoning; but when we attempt to include everything we know into the argument we make the loop as large as possible, attempting to incorporate in a coherent way as much data as possible. The adequacy of our interpretation rests on our ability to accommodate and explain the available data. Theologians would affirm that in some sense religious experience should be included in this data. The existence of this experience presupposes that there is a source for it, and despite many variations, this source has been called God; although others insist that it is also born from our own minds.

### Feeling and Reason

When philosophers learned that primitive, nonrational people, as they saw them, had a living and personal experience of divinity in the world (and history), they tried to represent this as a necessary idea of God, One who could be known or the existence of whom could be proved by reason alone. Thus they played down religious experience or religious feeling as a way of knowing God. But, instead of making people passionate and in love with the living God, this procedure made them anxious and uncertain, for God is not an idea of the mind but a living experience of divinity in the world. Eventually, as rationalist thinkers aimed at developing an objective epistemology, they subverted religious feeling as being purely subjective. They sought to separate the objective from the subjective. Theologians who held an undue regard for reason also contributed to the idea that reason was the image of God in man, and that it separated humans from the beasts which were controlled by instinct and base feeling.

We are still trying to overcome the disjoining results of this rationalistic predisposition. Friedrich Schleiermacher began the rehabilitation of religious experience and feeling by his theological view that religion is the “feeling of absolute dependence.” Soren Kierkegaard, resisting the identification of religion with reason and doctrine, also contributed to this theological move with his ontology of “passion.” Truth, he said, is what one is most passionate about, and the inwardness of faith is the highest passion. Rudolf Otto taught a phenomenology of religion in which he argued for a person’s state of mind that directly apprehends an ineffable numinous element in the world, the holy, which is completely independent of rational conceptualization and which is prior to any “feeling of dependence” or the assigning of attributes to God.

Alfred North Whitehead, in his “Process Theology,” also emphasized the dimension of self and feeling characteristic of every actual entity and the process of its becoming.

Scientists eventually came to understand that the proposed radical disjunction between the objective and the subjective was unwarranted. Not only was there an inseparable linkage between intuition, theory and experiment, but researchers could not totally separate their values from their projects. John Polkinghorne, particle scientist turned theologian, goes so far as to say that “cold” scientific theory is insufficient to take account of the “human longing” to make sense of the universe. The subjective should be con-

sidered a source of “real” knowledge.

On a practical level, humans have long combined feeling and reason for desired results. We may simply refer to our choosing a mate. What a sorry lot we would be if we employed either feeling or reason exclusively in selecting the one with whom we intended to spend the rest of our lives. We need to use both.

Theologically, one can affirm that God created human beings with the ability to feel as well as think rationally. Religious feeling, like other forms of feeling, may be nurtured and refined or suppressed and denied. Religious feeling is expressed more as art than as pure (objective) empirical description or rational analysis. When as believers we unite reason with feeling, or our understanding of the numinous in Jesus, we do so with the desire that through his life and teachings we may come to feel as God feels, love as God loves, suffer as God suffers, and reason as God reasons. Even our fear of death is tempered because in the numinous we feel God’s immortality. Once we do not have to defend our faith by a fragmented epistemology, we are freed to appreciate the mysteries of God from the perspective of fallible but faithful human beings attempting to symbolize those mutually human and divine feelings in developing pictures, ideas and doctrines. But the passion (feeling) we have for God and the pursuit of truth is more fundamental than strictly rational arguments or the formulation of unyielding doctrine.

Feelings about religion, however, are not all positive and constructive. When as Adventists we sense danger or detect a threat to our beliefs, as when doctrines are brought into question, we experience fear. Consider, for instance, the fear that things will disintegrate if critical methods are applied to Bible and doctrine. This fear is no less real than the fight for survival in a life-threatening crisis. Our fear is informing us, but we need to consider whether the fear is rational. Perhaps it is not. We also need to affirm a reasoning as well as a feeling about our spiritual and social condition. When people react to fear, they must not subordinate rationality to it. Our task is to guarantee that feeling and reason function holistically, and that one not be allowed to negate the other. A fear may be justified, but not necessarily for the reason we first expect.

### Assumptions and Fears: Rational and Irrational

There are two fears notable in Adventism today. One is that some of our doctrines may be biblically weak or wrong, and the second is that the church is in danger of slipping into a faith-eroding liberalism. Actually, both fears come from the assumed consequences of these possibilities. That we might have questionable doctrine would deny our fundamental assumptions about the Bible and revelation, thus our certainty of salvation. And theological liberalism, the source of questioning, might herald the demise of the church as God’s remnant people at the end of time and reduce us to being just one of many churches.

But are these fears sufficiently rational? Let us consider

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Continued on page 22



# Should Adventist Doctrine Be Logical?

Continued from page 21

the issue of liberalism first, because although it is an outgrowth of the doctrine of the church, it has taken on a political and emotive life of its own apart from discussions of doctrines or theology. Is it rational or irrational to fear that adopting a more liberal approach to theology and church will bring on the demise of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? There are two recurrent questions on this matter: Aren't the growing churches today conservative and fundamentalistic? And, don't conservatives support the church financially better than liberals?

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Many of the arguments about impending demise and retarded growth are based on specific kinds of arguments which rest on dubious and untested assumptions. In the case of liberalism causing the demise of the church, one often hears the slippery slope argument: once you start sliding, you cannot stop, and once liberalism is allowed in the church, soon there will be nothing left to believe in. Or one may be guilty of a hasty generalization. For example, "When the Methodists became liberal they began losing members, and the same thing will happen to us if we become liberal." We may consider this reasoning to be fallacious, because a conclusion has been generalized from an insufficient sampling of the target group. Also, there may be reasons other than being liberal for dwindling church membership. And on what grounds does one argue that a large membership is a sign of faithfulness?

In the cases of the growth of conservative and fundamentalistic churches, at the expense of the liberal ones, it may be argued hypothetically that people flock to them because of an irrational fear due to a perceived theological uncertainty. They may be hiding their heads in the sand. Or these churches may be growing because the members believe in big families. Or, it may be an educational system that contributes to church growth. But the causes for membership loss must be searched out by careful research and argumentation; otherwise one risks developing and promulgating an irrational fear where there is no sound reason to be fearful. A rational fear is one processed from the conclusion of a rigorous critical and rational process. For further analysis and commentary on the reasons for church growth and decline I refer the reader to the *Spectrum* article by A. Gregory Schneider, "The Real Reasons Conservative Churches Have Grown" (Oct. 7, 2002).

## The Fear of Compromising Doctrine

Although all doctrines are in unity, and making changes in one necessitates making changes in others, the compromise of Creation and Sanctuary seems to produce the most anxiety among Adventists. The anxiety results from the application of critical methods to their expression and understanding. What to do with historical criticism and modern science in understanding the doctrine of Creation is a staple of theological discussions by both conservative

and liberal scholars. Slightly less popular, but of equal importance, is the effect of historical and textual research on the doctrine of the Sanctuary. Presently, the popular Adventist understanding of the doctrine of the Sanctuary depends on assumptions about prophecy, history, texts and the authority of Ellen White. These assumptions are now being questioned by many Adventists familiar with both the textual and hermeneutical problems basic to the formulation of the Sanctuary doctrine.

Logicians recognize that logic is only as good as the presuppositions from which an argument begins, and ultimately where it ends. In using logic, while realizing its limitations, we try to keep honest and refrain from a kind of epistemological insanity brought on by the fear of facing the obvious, or the more probable.

With this in mind, we can ask several questions about the doctrine of the Sanctuary from a logical perspective. How reliable was the Millerite interpretation of the biblical texts dealing with the sanctuary and the end of time? And following, how are we to understand the explanation of the Great Disappointment with the Investigative Judgment? And further, if we are to be logical, wouldn't it seem rationally more respectable and less risky to argue that the Millerites, who were poorly educated, uncritical about biblical history, and having access to only a limited number of texts, both biblical and nonbiblical, would possibly formulate incomplete or even wrong ideas? Furthermore, wouldn't it be more likely that these ideas would be subject to correction and reinterpretation upon future events and the discovery and understanding of different, possibly better texts? And that, in turn, these events and texts would necessitate theological adjustments, even explanations of how a particular doctrine came into being? Wouldn't it be more risky, logically, to argue that these early formulated doctrines should be defended as changeless at all costs and by the most ingenious means, because an inspired prophet, also with little formal education, consented to them and thus made it unnecessary, even wrong, to debate text and theology? Doesn't it seem possible that doctrines, whether or not agreeable with Scripture, are not formulated from the Bible alone, but also from interests in contemporary issues, situations and questions?

If we were to change our ideas about how the pioneers came up with the doctrine of the Sanctuary we would not necessarily change or negate the core religious content of the spiritual passion and experience of the Millerites, Ellen White and the early Adventists. The doctrinal formulation may have been indicative of their scholastic inadequacies, but we don't have to reject their passion for God because of that. We will have to ask ourselves which is the most important for faith—embracing the Millerite and early Adventist passion for Christ, or defending the conservative position by affirming the debatable scholastic details of the Sanctuary doctrine? Once again, we are in the midst of examining our assumptions.

Recognizing that we have a problem of assumptions in



our theology, and acknowledging our fear of examining and possibly modifying them, we have to ask why it is that so many are reluctant to gain a more balanced or complete understanding of God and reality by walking through this dilemma with reason in one hand and religious experience and feeling in the other. While I would like to list “concern for the weak brother” as primary in this resistance to theological development, the hostility many people have received for being a strong brother leads me to think that the primary concern (fear) is political. It is not only the fear of alienating the fundamentalistic members; it is the fear of loss of control.

All organized religions exercise control over religious experience, or over spiritual manifestations. And to a degree they should control and shape it. No one stands alone. But some people are afraid that by turning the church over to Christ it will become liberal, atrophy and die; contributions will dry up and programs will have to be terminated. The way it stands, such a statement sounds simplistic. The church needs to be administered by human beings, and its membership needs to contribute financially to the institution. But at its base, the church is an organization of spiritually related people who are united by religious feeling and experience. It is not General Motors. And along with the impossibility of avoiding human folly in carrying out God’s work, it does follow from our theological presuppositions that we should let Christ take care of his church.

Do we passionately believe that when Christ said the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, he meant it? Will there not always be passion for God, for God’s existence, for salvation, and the fellowship of the saved? Are we willing to take the same risks God took in the Incarnation to free the church from dogmatic strictures and hope that its attributes flowing from God’s love will draw it closer, or even back to the source of that love? Would not this love open the purse strings of the membership? Admittedly, affirming passion for God as the ground for all theological beliefs and religious certainty sounds mystical. Some argue that because the mystic lives in God, no logical construction of beliefs or actions are needed. But the mystic also lives on earth, and as long as that is the case, symbols of truths too large to be encapsulated in a static doctrine must be refined and their spiritual content distilled so that new spiritually energized action may follow from God’s dynamic self-revelation.

As we affirm the liberating power of love and accept a risk like the one God took in the Incarnation to be faithful to his covenant with the creation, our questions and discussions of freedom—academic, cultural, social and religious—will seem like experiments in divine wisdom. While we allow for the working of free will, even in opposition to God, would it not be better for us to “assume” that whoever is loved and falls away will return to the source of love? Some do not return, of course, because of an inadequate understanding of God. Can the church perish if it loves? I think not.

Recently, I was reading in the spring 2002 issue of

*Spectrum* an article, “Why I remain a Seventh-day Adventist.” I, too, have a passionate desire to be, to remain, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist family. But I have to admit that I joined the church in a state of considerable ignorance. Now, with my educational background and general experience with humanity I would respond with considerable caution to an evangelistic appeal. I would have to admit that some things being preached rest on dubious assumptions which control biblical interpretation and result in bad theological reasoning. It isn’t that I could not under any condition affirm the specifics of certain doctrines, but that I could affirm them only if they were expounded under different theological presuppositions and given different interpretations. Applying critical tools to the tangible expressions of faith can only help us refine our inherited expressions of faith. Many fear to do so. But except as we do, we must forever appeal to the multitudes of the fearful and the ignorant, while alienating the informed. To some this may appear as intellectual arrogance, but truth reveals itself only to those who approach it in humility. And when one catches a glimpse of the truth, one follows wherever it leads.

The question I ask is, could I ever share my deepest spiritual experiences, passions and convictions with those who equated their religiosity, not with a passion for God, but with static doctrines, especially those expounded with invalid, unsound and weak arguments? Could I ever feel I was considered an equal in the body of Christ?

Despite the wishes of some, theological and religious pluralism are now characteristic of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some of this pluralism, while logically presented, is not the result of sound reasoning. It ranges from the insistence on personal theological opinion to the hunger for a deeper felt spirituality that is purely emotional. Such spirituality, without being accompanied by reason, sometimes goes astray, relapsing into a dangerous form of worship centering on self-exaltation, instead of developing an ethical orientation and reaching outward to affirm others and the world.

Contributing to the pluralism in the church are those who are passionate for God and the church. They work faithfully in the intellectual and spiritual vineyard. They fear God and walk humbly with their knowledge of the world. Because they realize that what appears to be the case is never identical with what is ultimately real, their approach to reality is similar to the way repentant sinners approach God. They hold that faith should seek understanding, not understanding seeking faith. They insist on thinking with clear heads, on defining their terms, on sound logic and rigorous argumentation; they use critical methods as tools, not as weapons. For them spiritual growth is not without intellectual struggle, but like Jacob, they wrestle with God, prevail, and receive the blessing of faith. Above all, they pray that they may feel God’s love as God feels it, and love others as God loves them. It is in the arms of this fellowship that I am held in the church. ■

*A. Josef (Joe) Greig, Ph.D., professor emeritus, Andrews University, received his Ph.D. in Old Testament from the University of Edinburgh.*



thank you

## I'd like to extend a special thanks

to all who responded to our holiday fund-raising campaign. Through your efforts, *Adventist Today* is in a position to meet its expenses, and should, with subscription renewals and your ongoing support, make the publication of our magazine possible through the balance of the current year.

As members of the Advisory Council gave over \$48,000 during 2002, and when that is added to what was given by others, the total came to \$67,000. The totals for 2001 were, respectively, \$34,000, and \$52,000. Thanks to each of you, we were able to end the year 2002 in the black. Your generosity has enabled us to meet our financial needs, despite ever-increasing costs.

The death in January 2003 of Raymond Cottrell, one of *Adventist Today's* founders, has saddened all of us. Ray's contributions and insightful direction helped make *Adventist Today* "must" reading for thoughtful Adventists. He will truly be missed.

Thanks to a number of Ray's admirers, a book about his truly remarkable life is taking shape. Douglas Hackleman, author and a long-time family friend, is working hard to complete the work. *Adventist Today* expects to publish the book, to be titled *The Unending Quest*, later this year. Funding for this project has been through specifically designated contributions by "Friends of Ray Cottrell."

Plans are taking shape for *Adventist Today's* presence and our reporting on events taking place at the next General Conference, planned for St. Louis, Mo, in 2005.

The leadership group of *Adventist Today* spent the first weekend in February developing plans for the magazine's future. Discussions ranged from how we might better serve our readership and improve both the quality and breadth of the articles we publish to how we may reach others who are not now part of *Adventist Today's* readership.

In the planning are an increased number of "area" meetings with supporters of *Adventist Today*. John McLarty, Elwin Dunn, and others from the magazine met with a number of you last year. Your positive comments and feedback provide inspiration for us and make it possible for us to connect with you. We welcome your ideas, issues you would like to hear more about, and particularly, talented writers you may know who can address topics of particular interest to our readers.

To better serve you, our readers and supporters, we would like to hear and meet with you. If you can form and bring a group together, we'll be pleased to join you. Make your plans now.

**Elwin Dunn, Chair/Publisher, *Adventist Today***

Your  
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