

adventist today

NEWS
ANALYSIS
OPINION

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A Personal Relationship with God

JOHN MCLARTY



I was in Palo Alto, California, to make a series of presentations on Progressive Adventism. I enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of conversations about geochronology and the shape of mature Adventism. During the worship service I preached one of my favorite sermons about the Friends of St. Thomas—people whose spiritual lives are characterized by both intense questioning and tenacious loyalty. In the afternoon, we had a wide-ranging Q-and-A session. I thought I was doing pretty good at fielding the questions until a young woman in her 20s seated near the front spoke up. “What about our personal relationship with Christ?” she asked. “It seems I never hear anything about that in the churches I’ve attended over the years. But isn’t that the most important thing?”

I was silenced. What use is church if it doesn’t connect its children with God? We could streamline our corporate structure, rework and simplify our doctrinal statements and develop workable solutions to the questions at the interface of religion and science, but if we are not helping each other cultivate deeply satisfying and life-forming relationships with God, what use is church?

What does a personal relationship with Jesus Christ look like? For some it is a deep, unshakable assurance that they have been forgiven. Like Paul, they see themselves as egregious sinners inexplicably chosen by God for salvation. For some of my friends, it means expecting frequent miracles of guidance or provision. For others “relationship” means a sense of participation with Jesus as they engage in service. They see Jesus in the faces of people with needs. Then there are the Jobs and Habakkuks of the world whose interaction with God is characterized by perplexity and agonized questions about the justice of God in the face of human suffering. Some most sharply experience God through art—performing or listening to music, painting or photographing, or gazing in rapt wonder at pictures or outdoor scenes of exquisite loveliness. C. S. Lewis remarked on the sweetness and spiritual

satisfaction that he found on occasion when he was wrestling with some passage of formal, highly theoretical theological discourse.

On the human level a relationship with God will take different forms, but Jesus pictures himself seeking a personal connection with each human individual. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will open the door, I will come in and we will share dinner together” (Rev 3:20). Trying to work out the logistics of this picture will either get you bogged down in the

Jesus pictures himself seeking a personal connection with each human individual.

impossibility of a personal God actually interacting in real time with billions of human individuals or caught up in spinning highly speculative solutions. We will make the most sense of this picture by paying attention to our romantic, artistic sensibilities.

At *Adventist Today* we value human intellect. We believe that God created us to think, to question, to probe, to analyze, to reason. We reject the notion that genuine Christianity contradicts reason. But this editor is equally convinced that reason is not adequate for a fully orbed response to reality. Aesthetics—music, visual arts, pottery, interior and landscape design—provides a valid, alternative way of responding to the world and to God. And romance—crazy, illogical, tempestuous, exhilarating, energizing romance—teaches us truth we can learn no other way. And then there are our spiritual sensibilities.

The Adventist church needs careful analysis and vigorous debate. We must correct systemic injustice and the woeful inefficiency of our current bureaucracy. We must be honest about our history and our failures. But if we are going to address the spiritual needs of our members and our friends, we must certainly attend to their first spiritual need: a personal connection with God.

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let everyone who hears, “Come!” ■

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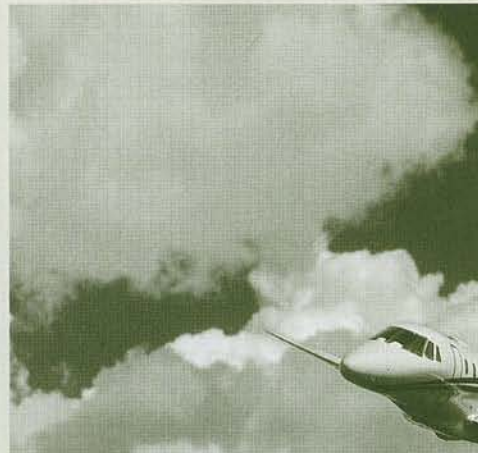
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Authority and the Five Books

I read with great interest and appreciation the article "The 5 Books of Adventist Theology" (AT Nov/Dec 2003). You made the statement, "For a liberal like myself to affirm Ellen White as an inspired authority says as much about my understanding of inspiration as it does about my views on Ellen White." I have concern about what this says about authority.... I thought authority is something that is conferred, not inspired. According to Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:18, NIV, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He did give His disciples authority over demons, but not over other human beings.... The letter to the editor by Kevin Paulson made an impassioned argument in favor of granting Ellen White the same authority granted to the Bible writers, but the Bible writers don't have authority either, because Jesus has it all. The Bible writers were witnesses who received light from heaven, and they testified concerning that light.

...And just like any human witnesses, they were capable of making some mistakes. Kevin Paulson would have done well to review the classic statement by E. G. White in *Desire of Ages*, page 324, "The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own." And so neither she nor the Bible writers should hold a place of authority in my soul or your soul, for Christ intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own.

Monroe Duerksen | Via the Internet

Prophets and Errors

You (McLarty, in AT Sept/Oct 2003) have failed to recognize the clear Biblical teaching on prophecy, i.e., as a spokesman for Jehovah, a true prophet is not permitted to speak error (see Deut. 18:22 and 13:1-3), and will be corrected should he do so (Cf. Num. 12, Num. 20:10-12, and 1 Chron. 17:1-4). If, indeed, Ellen White reversed any public statement, she did it while she was alive; and we may accept her final teaching as authoritative. As you say, even a prophet may grow in understanding; but neither modern "scholarship" nor "translating" has ever disproven anything Ellen White has prophetically proclaimed. If the journalists in your well-produced, albeit "progressive"-leaning, magazine will fairly consider the opinions here and previously presented, a perspective closer to true Seventh-day Adventism might one day be more evident in *Adventist Today*.

Jerry Garner | Grand Junction, Colo.

Humility and the Five Books

I love the conclusion of your article, "The Five Books of Adventist Theology" (AT Sept/Oct 2003), except for the first line of that last paragraph. Why do we need to be afraid to acknowledge an infallible Bible?... If indeed humility is a cardinal virtue, why not accept Jesus' own assertion that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), and

acknowledge the Bible as the "infallible point of contact with God"?... I do well not to attribute those seeming deficiencies to its divine Author or even to its human authors, but rather to the puniness of my degenerate brain.... An observation on #5: I think "Christian history" had very little to do with our maturing understanding of the Trinity. It was 1) ongoing Bible study; and 2) Ellen White.... And my confidence in Ellen White grows as I see her clarity of Scriptural understanding on this subject.... She was reading her Bible, and listening to the Spirit.... Adventist theology is indeed a human endeavor and therefore subject to revision, clarification and even correction. But genuine Adventism doesn't do theology from the theologians or from the rocks or from human reasoning—we do it from the Bible; we do it humbly, recognizing we're frail enough to benefit from an end-time prophetic voice. Only with that foundation can it be helpful to reference the clouded "books" of nature and Christian history. That's why Goldstein was right (though he could have been kinder) to say that those who wish to do theology from other sources ought not to call themselves Adventists.

Dale Wolcott | Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

Conservative and Pseudo-Liberal

I found Timothy Standish's discussion on "liberals" and "pseudo-liberals" and his metaphor of the "little pond" and the "big, bad ocean" (AT Sept/Oct 2003) superb. Many words change meaning over time, but some do so rapidly and drastically.... In politics, for example, "Democracy" can mean by now just about anything on the spectrum.... The meaning of "liberal" and "conservative" has also been severely distorted. The 19th-century "classical" liberal was strongly in favor of liberty, small government, economic freedom, respect for the individual, and going to war when unavoidable. Today's "liberal," on the contrary, wants big government to take care of almost everything, [and] subordinates individual freedom to equality and "tolerance."

...In the church context, the use of such ambiguous labels leads to vast confusion and frequent misunderstandings. What all of us Adventists must do is state clearly and specifically what we want to keep and change, and why—without allowing the pseudo-intellectuals and other unbelievers in the "big, bad ocean" (today's orthodoxy) to decide it for us. Perhaps some new words are needed to express the various possible positions. In the meantime, Dr. Standish's neologism "pseudo-liberal" is an apt suggestion.

Hector Hammerly | Maple Ridge, B.C., Canada

Death Before Sin?

Concerning the origin of our traditional view of when death came into the world, you seem to suggest (AT editorial Sept/Oct 2003) that our traditional view might not be correct. However, one source for that view is probably Paul. See Romans 5:12-14 where death seems to have entered the world through Adam's sin.

Howard White | Saniku Gakuin College, Japan

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Goldstein and Literal Reading of Genesis

I have just read Clifford Goldstein's diatribe against those who do not accept a literal reading of Genesis 1-2:2a. So he wants Adventists like myself to leave. Bit of a quandary that, where does he suggest I go?

It is like the Florentine priest who in 1614 demanded the arrest of all mathematicians and astronomers who were opposing the "true" understanding of the universe as taught by the church and scripture.

However, Goldstein's assumption that those who reject a literal six-day creation and a 6,000-year time-span are Darwinists and macroevolutionists is untrue. One can reject Darwinism and macroevolution, as I do, and still not hold to a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-2:2a, or accept any imposed time span. Scientists like Behe (1990s), Sir Fred Hoyle and the mathematician Wickramanathie (1981) using science and the maths of probability demolished Darwinism and macroevolution as untenable, without making any appeals to Genesis. Hoyle's mode of creationism and argument for design is far more dangerous to the present orthodoxy than anything produced by the fundamentalists of the Creation Science Movement and their ilk.

The second assumption is that the creation account in all of its parts is verbally inspired, infallible and therefore, by inference, exhaustive; this too is untrue. The Bible, while thought-inspired and progressive in understanding, is not inerrant, nor exhaustive. In the case of the first creation story the cosmology is Babylonian in character and the progress of creation is very close to other creation stories.

The difference is the theology and the Hebrew understanding of God that stands in contrast to pagan perceptions of their deities. It is both a liturgical and theological statement containing good news, given in an accessible language and time frame to a nonscientific people; the maths and science of it all could wait. God begins where people are, and is not afraid to allow existing cultural models, images and metaphors, however faulty, to be used so long as He is at the centre. The Bible is full of such images and literary forms that have initially pagan usage, the psalms, for example, and the structure of the tabernacle. If God was to "re-encode" the same information to us today the information level would be much more scientific and mathematically sophisticated, but not exhaustive. One could also conclude that unlike the Greeks, the Hebrews had no real interest in the age of the earth or the extent of the heavens, rather they were interested in the Who of the heavens, and how that impacted upon their existence, reason for worship, a covenant relationship and ultimately salvation.

Thirdly, the obsession with six days and 6,000 to

10,000 years is, in the light of Wilder-Smith's information theory, and the issue of probability, meaningless. If the probability of a single enzyme randomly occurring is $10^{40,000}$ in other words, nil, then the argument about age is a red herring. If the earth could be shown to be 8.5 billion years old or the universe 100 billion years old, life as we know it would still not exist. In principle Genesis is right, and there is a powerful case for creationism, but not as put by Goldstein and his ilk. The time span of six days or 144 hours is more symbolic and encapsulates a microcosm of a truth pointing to a greater reality stretching far beyond the mere text of the Bible.

Finally, to support that point, at Cambridge University in 2002 there was a private meeting of the top astronomers to discuss the problem of the speed of light and other issues; one of the conclusions reached was that despite the billions of light years of space observed we could be living in a sub-universe! The vastness of space should tell us something. What a God! Living in eternity and speaking to us from infinity, what language can he use to express his time frame and his reality? I suggest that Genesis 1:1 alone is sufficient to give support to origins,

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Divine sovereignty, worship, and the Sabbath, because before such a Being time is meaningless. It is we who live in time with all its limits. While embracing the great principle of creation, let the argument over literalism cease; God is too vast and great for such schoolmen-like pedantry. Now, as an unrepentant creationist of a different school of thought, I will look out for the postman to bring me my letter of excommunication.

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Getting it Right

BOB WONDERLY

This commentary is in response to John McLarty's "from the editor" column in the July/August 2003 issue of *Adventist Today*.

I agree with John about getting it "Wrong Every Time." I would like to offer my understanding of what causes us to do that and, from my perspective, how we can approach getting it right. From my software engineering background I will contrast what I view as two different approaches to constructing a belief system, suggesting what problems are intrinsic to one and what I view as the advantages of the other.

In part, the Faith and Science symposium held at Glacier View last August dealt with the severe cognitive dissonance between classical Seventh-day Adventist theology and information from science. It seems to me that the root cause of this dissonance is our unrealistic notion of inspiration, which motivates us to build a theological edifice from what I will call a "bottom up" rather than a "top down" perspective. While both of these approaches can be used successfully in designing computer software, I am suggesting here that only the latter gives superior results when designing a belief system.

The risks of building from the bottom up

In the bottom-up approach, one starts with a list of doctrines. In our case, these include a young earth, a six-day creation, young life, the fall and subsequent expulsion from the garden, a global flood, no death before the fall, the cross, salvation, inspiration to only a chosen few, and a recent prophetess. Think of these, along with those required to complete the list, as subsystem components. The engineering process for designing a theology using this approach involves choosing which components will be used, how they will be interconnected and interfaced, and what will be their interdependencies.

Before one starts such an enterprise, there must be a purpose which the resulting theological edifice is supposed to accomplish. Presumably one important objective is to achieve a better understanding of God. While the bottom-up approach sometimes does result in what we view as a better appreciation and description of God than we had before, there are several major risks inherent in using it.

One problem is that when any one of the constituents (components, interdependencies and interfaces) of the edifice fails, the whole structure has a tendency to collapse. Then one must pick up what's left and start over, or completely abandon the enterprise. If a great amount of energy was used in the building process, some cannot resist the temptation to defend the system at all cost. Others will abandon the system in its entirety rather than rebuild.

There is a risk that pride—of ownership, of design, of creation and of construction cost—will cause us to believe we have the ultimate system, "the whole truth." Then we succumb to the temptation to defend our handiwork no matter what, and especially when it is threatened by someone pointing to compelling evidence from science and/or history that some constituent has a serious weakness and is probably theologically unnecessary anyway. The idea that perhaps we did "get it wrong" is, we then think, untenable. So we react to protect what we have worked so hard to create. While such reaction is understandable, it usually suffers from having unintended consequences and undesirable side effects.

Building from the top down with 3 big questions

My suggestion for getting it right is to construct the belief system from the "top down" instead of from the bottom up. Then it can't collapse. My way of starting is

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the same as Descartes': "I think, therefore I am." I exist and reality exists. I speak now in the first person telling how I proceed from there. I see three big questions, the answers to which, for me, set the tone for all that follows.

Does God exist? How I answer this First Question has no bearing upon whether or not God really exists (the word “really” in this case is meaningless anyway). But my answer has enormous meaning for how and why I choose to really live my life, “really” now being pregnant with meaning. I must make this decision in the complete absence of compelling scientific or historic evidence. If there were such hard evidence, I would not be free to make this most important of all decisions as I choose.

Any God worthy of The Name transcends scientific methods of analysis, investigation and proof. Any god whose existence could be proved using the rules of mathematical logic or the investigative principles of physics would be totally inadequate to receive my respect, love, admiration and worship. Worse than that, I would always be subject to those who worked out the proof, the demonstration, obliged to learn about and approach God through them, contradictory to the message of Jesus whose mission was to democratize knowledge about, and access to, God.

I have personally answered my First Question in the affirmative. For me the idea that God exists computes. It is my fundamental postulate, my basic assumption. To argue that there can be nothing other than that for which we can obtain hard evidence is arrogance. To claim possession of detailed knowledge of that “Other” is equally arrogant.

My Second Question follows immediately: **Is this God relevant to me as a human?** Are God’s existence and mine connected in some important way? I believe that I exist because God created. This second postulate establishes a very important relationship between God and me. God is Creator and I am created. God is God and I am human. Being human is my most basic permanent operating characteristic.

With these two most important fundamental assumptions established, I can now look all around me and see extensive evidence of the consequences of God’s creative act(s). And whether that is plural or singular is not only irrelevant but also undecidable. The important thing to note is that the evidence follows, rather than leads, my choice of fundamental postulates.

My Third Question is: **Does God intend for me to be free?** Free, as in so free that I can surprise God, that I can do some thing, create some thing, some idea, that God has neither thought of nor done? For it to be otherwise would mean that I am a mere computer doomed to follow a prearranged and previously imposed program over which I have neither say nor control.

I view attempts to determine precisely when, where, what, how, or why, God created as futile. These questions and their answers have meaning only with respect to the Creator. For created beings, it must

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suffice to ponder, appreciate, and creatively describe and explain, the observable consequences of God’s having created.

Discovering God in the light

It seems to me that to look for God in those aspects of Creation for which we lack satisfactory explanation is to make a major mistake. Better that we find the character and attributes of God in the parts of the created world we think we know and understand the most, those for which we have the best observations and the most complete explanations and descriptions. Better that we discover God in light rather than look for him in shadow.

The act of Creating always imbues created beings with significant properties that are inherently and inevitably shared by Creator with the created. For humans we refer to these as the “Image of God in Man,” identified here as freedom, love, creativity, a sense of beauty, curiosity and intelligence, and even a sense of humor.

It seems to me that beginning at the top, deciding first what I believe about God and the relationship between God and humans as described earlier, then working down—suspending the less important and more detailed beliefs from that framework—gives me two big advantages. The first is that nothing I learn from either science or history can jeopardize my starting point. The second is that it is much easier to repair, replace, rearrange, and re-suspend the details when the need arises. My “top-down” framework can not collapse catastrophically because it depends on nothing below. For me that is “getting it right.” ■

Bob Wonderly is a retired software engineer and database and computing consultant. He holds an M.A. in mathematics from the University of North Carolina.

Report on Monterey Bay Academy

ADVENTIST TODAY EDITORS

On Jan. 11, newspapers in central California and Internet Web sites carried stories about a civil lawsuit filed against Monterey Bay Academy, near Watsonville, Calif., stemming from alleged molestations involving two academy teachers, Ronald E. Wittlake and Lowell E. Nelson, and five former students, said to have occurred some 20 years ago. Although the trial has not been held yet, Wittlake, a former music teacher at MBA, committed suicide on Jan. 15, four days after the story appeared as front-page news in local papers.

That the plaintiffs should take so long to press charges is attributed by their attorney, Joseph Scully, to their efforts to suppress the memory of their painful experience. Because of the delay, criminal charges were not allowed by the court, only civil.

The facts of the case will be spelled out in detail when the case comes to trial, although the trial has been put off indefinitely at the request of the defendants' lawyer, Philip Hiroshima. Alumni of the school who attended during the years 1981 to 1989, during the tenure of Wittlake, when many of the troubles were said to have occurred, have

It is not enough to try to protect the good name of the church or one of its schools at the expense of young people. If the Adventist academy is to serve as a haven of refuge for the church's youngest members during their stressful adolescent years, it must look beyond the academics and ensure the moral and ethical quality of their environment.

mixed recollections of the period. Some say they heard absolutely nothing untoward about the accused teachers; others say they heard rumors. Principals of the school during those years included Harvey Voth, Ernie Unruh and Keith Wheeler. Ted Winn took over after the brief tenure of his two predecessors and continued for five years. Wittlake was dismissed from the school in 1989. The plaintiff's lawyer, Joseph Scully, asks how word of such mischief could not be known throughout a dormitory, even a whole school. He thinks there is an attempted coverup here.

A letter regarding the situation was sent to alumni and friends of the school and signed jointly by Jerry Page, president of the Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and chair of the academy board, and Bill Keresoma, present principal of the academy. It referred to two previous letters sent to parents, in September of 2003 and January of 2004. The first read, "I do need to tell you some sad news. Monterey Bay Academy, Central

California Conference and former MBA staff members have been sued civilly for alleged misconduct that occurred more than 18 years ago. The staff members have not worked at MBA for some time. Attorneys have been retained to defend MBA, the conference and the individuals named in the complaint. It must be remembered that at this time these are merely allegations, which have yet to be proved."

In the January letter to the same parents, Keresoma declared that "four additional civil complaints have been filed" against the same entities. This letter ended with the words, "Be assured, the well-being and safety of your child is our highest priority. We will keep you updated as needed." The joint letter concluded with mention of the suicide of Wittlake and said the writers' thoughts and prayers were for the surviving family.

The letter is noncommittal, as can be expected under the circumstances. Students, faculty and alumni of the school are anxious to see that the school's good name is not besmirched by idle accusations. Whatever the outcome of the trial, the case should be a reminder to church-run secondary schools that rumors on campus need to be listened to by deans and administrators. Students and faculty alike should have access to some kind of counselor who is independent of the school's paid staff and who can hear out complaints. Social work professionals point out that all persons working in the proximity of young people—teachers, pastors, social workers, deans, counselors and others—are mandated by law to report any rumors they hear to a Child Protective Services office. One such professional told me she thought that, starting with the local conference secretary of education, all teachers in the primary and secondary grades should be given specific instruction on what to do when they hear rumors of children who are being physically or sexually abused. They should be alert for symptoms of such abuse, such as the "acting out" behavior of some students. And if a teacher is fired because of such misconduct, the school should look further into the needs of students who were victims. It is not enough to try to protect the good name of the church or one of its schools at the expense of young people. If the Adventist academy is to serve as a haven of refuge for the church's youngest members during their stressful adolescent years, it must look beyond the academics and ensure the moral and ethical quality of their environment.

As Jesus once pointed out, "The time is coming when everything will be revealed; all that is secret will be made public. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!" (Luke 12:2, 3.) If ever truth and justice are suppressed in the name of loyalty, the cause of God is sure to suffer. ■



Waco, Texas: Eleven Years Later

JAMES STIRLING

Eleven years ago, in its very first issue, *Adventist Today* covered the story of David Koresh's dramatic 51-day standoff with Federal agents at Mt. Carmel, near Waco, Texas. The siege that had gripped TV audiences for weeks ended with a Rambo-style raid including the exchange of gunfire and spectacular flames and resulting in the death of Koresh and 73 of his followers. His Branch Davidian "compound" was turned to ashes on that day, June 19, 1993. Fortunately, nearly 60 had left the compound before the fire. The Federal agents had acted on a belief that Koresh held unregistered firearms and was molesting children by marrying them. The details of the event are still fuzzy; witnesses in later trials could not agree on just what happened. Robert McCurry wrote later that "part of America's heart and soul died" in the tragic event.

What has happened to the remaining Branch Davidians since Koresh died? An enterprising reporter from the Texas Monthly magazine, Michael Hall, paid a visit to Mount Carmel in the spring of 2003 to find out who might still be there. Near the gate of the property he found a small new chapel tended by Clive Doyle, 62, a preacher who lives in a small double-wide mobile home next to the church. Doyle had survived the fire, though his hands were badly burned. He serves a congregation of four other Davidian survivors; he estimates that there are only a dozen or so Davidians left in Texas, and "maybe a hundred in the world." He holds his services, or "studies," on Saturdays, sitting in a chair and discussing Bible themes with members and visitors. He still believes in Koresh's teachings, especially those related to the seven seals of Revelation, for which he thought Koresh had the essential key. And he and his flock look for David Koresh's resurrection and return.

Elsewhere on the 77 windswept, desolate acres of the Branch Davidian property, in a renovated barn at the

opposite end, Hall found another Davidian congregation. There were six people who disavowed Koresh as a prophet and followed instead the teachings of Ben and Lois Roden, themselves also self-proclaimed prophets, now deceased. The Rodens had preceded Koresh on the property, but he had displaced them. Charlie Pace, the current leader of this group, with his wife and three children and three grown women still claim the rightful title to the property. Others as well have disputed Doyle's claim, but after a lengthy trial the court has decided simply that the property belongs to

The question still lingers in the minds of many church members today—could such a thing happen again?

"the church." So now these small groups, all Sabbath keepers, remain and try to focus on the future calamities they all are sure will come.

Early on in the first wave of publicity in 1993 the Seventh-day Adventist Church took pains to distance itself from the Davidian heresy, for these "prophets" and most of their followers had earlier in their lives been Adventists. Hall's only reference to the church as a journalist was to say, "Adventists, who follow certain Jewish traditions and rituals (such as a Saturday Sabbath), predict Christ's imminent return to cleanse a wicked world." He didn't have it exactly right, but the question still lingers in the minds of many church members today—could such a thing happen again? There is a tradition of "proof-texting" in our past, the tendency some have to scout the Scriptures for passages that seem to support their pet theories. Perhaps now, as we grieve for the many who were once part of our community but died in the tragedy, we can take note of the sad ending that can come from misplaced religious fervor. ■



EDWIN A. SCHWISOW

Three Angels Broadcasting

Did the three angels of Revelation 14 have a stiff tailwind as they shouted their apocalyptic warnings from the skies?

The Bible doesn't spell out the weather report, but it does say the angels showed up in full voice—energetic, hardly out of breath—when they delivered their messages.

The same can't quite be said this year for their high-flying Illinois namesake, satellite television network Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN).

For the first time in its nearly two-decade history, donations to the independent Adventist programming and broadcasting ministry slipped last year, as 3ABN continues its quest to reach every nation, kindred, tongue and people on earth. And according to 3ABN president Danny Shelton, the reasons for the decline are by no means understood at headquarters.

Some 3ABN supporters, however, believe that the answer may be written prominently on the inside fuselage walls of two executive jet aircraft (one now for sale, one leased) that 3ABN's founders have been using for more than a year for corporate travel.

History

3ABN's around-the-clock five-satellite ministry has grown from its start in the mid-1980s to a ministry receiving annual donations of about \$15 million a year. Led by the country-voiced, sweet-singing Shelton and his demure, soft-spoken wife, Linda, 3ABN's story makes inspiring reading.

Danny Shelton, who points to his high school diploma as the epitome of his formal education, is a poster boy for sanctified ambition. Some 3ABN supporters speak of him as "inspired" and almost messianic, and until last year, 3ABN's rate of ascent was measured in increments of angelic warp speed.

The Sheltons have established a new style in Adventist media, stripped of the aristocratic cool of a George

Vandeman, the cerebral rumble of an H.M.S. Richards, or the austere reclusiveness of a William Fagal.

The Sheltons present themselves, instead, as a simple, God-fearing family, dedicated to proclaiming Adventist Christianity around the world, 24 hours a day. And many who know the Sheltons personally say that what you see on television is what you get in person—authenticity, plainspokenness, dedication.

But 3ABN's growth from a mom-and-pop media outlet in North Frankfort, Ill., to a multimillion-dollar corporation is not happening without growing pains.

What once was seen as Danny Shelton's precocious, hands-on style is now interpreted by critics as heavy-handed control of 3ABN's small, compliant board. And the Sheltons' use of the executive jets reinforces a view that success has tainted the self-sacrificing spirit of 3ABN's first couple.

Always a man who takes pride in keeping in touch with his supporters, Shelton knows he's not pleasing everyone these days—he admitted as much in a lengthy Dec. 29 telephone interview with *Adventist Today*. But he still believes he has been faithful to the vision God has given him and that 3ABN is operating in an impressively thrifty, efficient way.

"We had an Associated Press reporter here this month, and you could tell she was very skeptical about 3ABN. She stayed here several days, and we gave her access to everything, opened our books to her, gave her the information she wanted. By the end, her attitude had turned around completely, and we believe her story will be very positive."

The story of 3ABN is a positive one of outstanding growth—an old, old story the Sheltons tell often and well.

Shelton, a builder and carpenter, saw the need to create a television network to spread the end-time gospel. By



Network: A High-Flying Organization

most accounts, he's delivered what he promised—simple, conservative, direct Bible preaching and music that calls audiences to conversion. Last year, 3ABN added around-the-clock Spanish-language programming and a 24-hour-a-day radio presence on satellite.

Shelton characterizes 3ABN programming as “more hard-hitting” than denominationally produced fare, and says 3ABN’s status as an independent nonprofit insulates the church from criticism of being too critical of other Christian denominations—most notably Roman Catholicism.

And he says he would welcome the advent of additional networks, of Adventist-oriented satellite programming—say, networks to meet the minds of intellectuals and liberals, Muslims and Hindus, New Age pagans, or secular American agnostics. The network, he says, reaches the world—but through programming designed primarily for an already Christianized viewership. But, he claims, there’s plenty of room for other Adventist entrepreneurs to devise television ministries for other demographics.

By some counts, 3ABN is now the second-largest religious broadcasting television network in the world. And records show that thousands have found their way into Adventism by watching 3ABN telecasts. Many Adventist pastors point to viewers of 3ABN who have appeared at their church doors, eager and informed for baptism.

Economic Downturn

Given 3ABN’s resilience, success, and impressive economic expansion during each of its first eighteen years, why the plateau or downturn in 2003?

Danny Shelton says he has no easy answers and refuses to chalk it up to a slow economy or donor dissatisfaction. He says he needs time and outside help to sort things through.

“I’ve asked the Lord to show me if, perhaps, something I,

Danny Shelton, am doing is the reason we’re down this year. Frankly, I don’t know the reasons, yet,” he says.

But he’s not meditating on these things to the detriment of his other duties. He continues to work hard to sign more agreements with cable outlets to carry 3ABN programming. Recent successes in placing 3ABN on cable in the southeastern United States have brought more than a million new potential viewers—a success that by all counts should add hundreds of new names to the 3ABN donor base.

High Flying

But observers are increasingly asking if Danny and Linda’s use of corporate jets (one, a Mitsubishi Diamond, owned by 3ABN and now for sale; and another leased plane, a Cessna Citation) may contain elements of the answer to 3ABN’s financial concerns.

At press time, Shelton still rejected that possibility: 3ABN receives about 1,500 letters a month from viewers, he says, and there is no indication from these letters that the planes have become an issue among donors.

3ABN’s supporters understand that the Sheltons need to circulate, reach out, meet the people, he says. They want to see him and Linda, speak to them personally, share. He believes supporters understand that by using an executive plane, 3ABN can reach many more people much more effectively.

But others suggest that in using the planes, the Sheltons may be erasing the very credibility their visits are intended to stoke. Kermit Netteburg, now with the North American Division as assistant for communication and a man Shelton acknowledges as an acquaintance, noted last August that 3ABN’s use of the plane seems to coincide directly with the decline of as much as a million dollars in annual donations.

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Three Angels Broadcasting Network

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Times are indeed changing, as 3ABN struggles to find a management style that remains true to its self-proclaimed principles of thrift and accountability.

But Netteburg also claims to empathize with 3ABN's decision to use the planes: "What we sometimes forget is that 3ABN is now a very big organization," Netteburg said. "To run a corporation this large takes resources. One thing I can tell you is that at a recent meeting, the Sheltons arrived on time, rested and ready to work, and were the only ones who were able to be home that night, to sleep in their own beds, ready for work the next day."

What the weary, and perhaps envious, Netteburg sees as an advantage, however, may be seen by others as self-indulgence—a trait not lightly tolerated in a denomination whose top executives do not now enjoy, and in fact never have enjoyed, regular use of jet-powered executive aircraft.

A Shelton acquaintance who has been featured prominently on 3ABN in recent years, Adventist missionary pilot David L. Gates, echoes those thoughts. Son of a foreign missionary and subject of a recent biography published by the denomination's Pacific Press, the bone-thin Gates lives an austere life as a missionary to South America.

"Danny and I were talking, a while back, and he told me I needed a jet like his for the work I do," Gates remembers. "And my response was, 'Danny, I ask many people working with me to make tremendous sacrifices. And if I flew in a plane like yours, I would have no credibility among these people. Yes, in a practical sense I could use a jet. But as a leader, I have to stay close to the people, live as they live, travel as they travel. That's the only kind of leadership I know.'"

Gates's asceticism hardly represents the entire philosophical bandwidth of 3ABN supporters. But it captures an essential trait of Adventism that bears emphasizing—that Adventists by and large are hypercritical of the appearance of ostentation and privilege among those they see as called by God to service. Are the Sheltons losing touch with the mindset of their self-sacrificing donors?

The downturn in 3ABN donations was tacitly acknowledged in May 2003 in a general letter in which the usually positive Sheltons admitted that things just weren't going as well as they should, at least with 3ABN's Spanish-language programming venture. They said that donations had, indeed, reached a plateau and that developing the Spanish-language component was impossible unless funding took a turn for the better.

Meanwhile, in South America, an Adventist-affiliated group known as "A.D. Venir" (pronounced Ah Day

VehnEER)—led by David Gates himself—was placing a competing Spanish-language programming service on satellite, at a cost of \$1.5 million.

The times are indeed changing, as 3ABN struggles to find a management style that remains true to its self-proclaimed principles of thrift and accountability. It now directs an international empire that reaches most of the globe with multilingual signals on five satellites, from studios in America, Russia and the Philippines.

In the process, the planes may be costing 3ABN a lot more than fuel, insurance and airport fees.

Signs of the Times

About 3,000 Adventist businessmen and their families gathered last August to celebrate the annual divisionwide convention of Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries (ASI), of which 3ABN is a prominent member. The network commanded a well-lit corner booth on the ASI exhibit floor—clearly, the most often-visited booth among the hundreds of exhibitors.

Shelton himself, in casual attire, showed up sporadically at the booth, but he seemed preoccupied with other matters. His staff told visitors that because of overwhelming responsibilities—3ABN was taping or televising live several convention plenary sessions—Shelton's availability to talk personally with them would be limited.

As I circulated among the scores of booths on the exhibit floor, several prominent exhibitors, of their own accord, volunteered their disappointment with 3ABN's decision to acquire and operate the planes. They knew me for my 26 years with Adventist media in the North Pacific Union, much of it during the halcyon years of 3ABN's growth. I had helped organize large broadcasting conventions in the Northwest, bringing together media-minded pastors, technicians, laymen and church executives—including former General Conference president Robert Folkenberg.

During those conventions, we'd given 3ABN supporters unlimited time to explain how local groups could sponsor low-power television stations to rebroadcast the 3ABN signal. Even today, 3ABN acknowledges that the Pacific Northwest has the highest concentration of facilities rebroadcasting their signal of any union territory in North America.

I was—and am—considered supportive of the vision of 3ABN and well-informed on media matters, and it was entirely natural for men such as retired pastor/evangelist

Don Gray of Vancouver, Wash., to tell me quietly, "The plane is hurting Danny, I'm afraid. He should just get rid of it."

Several other ASI members made similar comments—not as a condemnation of 3ABN, but in the sorrowful, hushed tones of a relative lamenting a loved one who continues to refuse medical treatment for a dread disease.

When, sometime later, I asked Shelton himself about the possibility that his traveling arrangements were hurting the 3ABN cause, he dismissed it out of hand—as he apparently does with others who raise the issue. He is determined, he said, to weather any turbulence—in fact, he says there is no turbulence—regarding the planes.

He explained to me that the planes make it possible for him and Linda to meet more people, more often. That's what the Adventist people want and expect, he said. And in the post-911 era, traveling by common carrier simply takes too much time and limits him and his wife to too few visits to too few churches and rallies across the land.

Indeed, since acquiring the aircraft, 3ABN's weekend rallies have increased markedly in frequency—a fact that ordinarily would stimulate donations to the cause. But the opposite has occurred.

The network is wrestling to remain in contact with the down-home values and concerns of its donors—that much is clear. But now, as it emerges as a worldwide corporation, the bonds of credibility seem strained. And the plane is not the only problem.

It doesn't help that word is out that the Sheltons' salaries exceed those of even the highest-paid administrative ministers in the Adventist Church (a charge Danny Shelton categorically denies, citing figures that show he personally earned less than \$50,000 last year and that he declined to accept any retirement benefits.)

But 3ABN's audited statements for calendar years 2001 and 2002 show that the decrease in salary must be quite recent, as Shelton is quoted on those documents as earning more than \$60,000 a year.

All told, the temperature is rising in the cockpit. And Danny Shelton's voluntary forfeiture of part of his salary suggests he's feeling at least some of the heat. But, is lopping off \$700 or \$800 from his monthly paycheck going to be enough to fight the perception that the Sheltons have succumbed to the siren call of creature comforts and opulence?

What of the Future?

No one questions the genius of Danny Shelton and the on-screen appeal of his wife and family members. No one disputes that the Sheltons have accomplished what no other Adventist dared attempt.

But in my recent conversation with Shelton, one 60-second aside he volunteered in the course of our two-hour interview seemed to reveal more about the issue than all of the other minutes combined. Speaking of the many times 3ABN has been criticized, he offered: "It is actually at the times when we are under greatest attack that we receive the most donations. Those who have

attacked us have actually helped us grow."

It was a challenge—and perhaps in writing this article with its references to the couple's high-flying ways, I have already fallen into the negative column of the Sheltons' esteem. But I hope not. I write as a friend and well-wisher, representing what must surely be scores of voices in Adventism who fear writing that letter, or letters, to 3ABN.

Why? Do they fear losing Danny's friendship or further invitations to promote their own ministries via 3ABN? I don't know, and Danny assured me in our interview that his supporters are fearless in criticizing 3ABN. So, what gives? What may well be happening is that Shelton has not yet fully grasped that times are changing rapidly for 3ABN. For most of his media career, Danny Shelton has thrived on controversy—as the blue-eyed David defending against heavy-browed Goliaths such as the General Conference, competing ministries, and local county leaders who recently challenged 3ABN's nonprofit credentials.

But today, 3ABN is neither small nor, apparently, invulnerable. And in what some donors see as another sign of the times, 3ABN has let out the word that it now receives more donated money than any other Adventist media ministry, including the venerable Voice of Prophecy and It Is Written programs.

While technically correct, the information reinforces a view that 3ABN's little David may be drinking too eagerly from the brook of its own success, paying less attention to selecting the thrifty, smooth stones that have contributed to its rise to prominence.

The plane, the salary, the strong personal control, the bit about being biggest—all form the borders of what could develop into a less-than-flattering jigsaw portrait of a modern 3ABN Goliath.

The Sheltons are by no means unaware of at least some of these issues. They're trying to respond to the challenge, but 2003 may well go down as the year they prescribed the wrong medication for, essentially, the right problems.

They understand that 3ABN's bigness is gnawing at the critical essence of its appeal—the hominess, the access, the Mr. Rogerliness. And they also sense that controversy and attacks by others are not quite the allies they were when 3ABN was a babe in arms.

What Danny seems one moment to accept—and the next to deny—is that 3ABN is not what it used to be. It's bigger, it's stronger, its influence is worldwide. And with that power comes a new image—an impersonality far more vulnerable to criticism, where rumors can take on lives of their own and brood for decades in the recesses of the public subconscious.

The Sheltons believe their planes help them bolster their repartee with the Adventist public, when in fact the aircraft may be eloquently contradicting the very message they were intended to help deliver.

One supporter I spoke with at the ASI convention suggested that the Sheltons would do well to study the success of the late Wal-Mart founder, Arkansan Sam

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CONSOLIDATION of SDA Conferences, Colleges and Universities

THAINE PRICE

The Seventh-day Adventist Church desperately needs courageous leaders with a vision to reform and consolidate our present sprawling administrative structure. Our present structure was set up to deal with conditions of a century ago but is outmoded today. Social theorist Max Weber once noted that bureaucracies typically hold self-preservation as their primary value, and thus are resistant to change. But now the church has a mission that goes far beyond the preservation of outmoded institutions; we need to concentrate on how to use our scarce resources to get the job done for God.

As a first example of redundancy, I would point to the union conferences, especially in the United States. In the days of slow travel and communication the church needed administrative centers that would allow them to keep in touch with regional problems. Today, however, with the vast resources of air travel, fast electronic communication and speedy methods of delivering messages and materials, we no longer need the elaborate buildings and staffing represented in the system of union conferences. They absorb much of the tithe money contributed by local church members, and their presidents hold great power over local jurisdictions. They are unnecessary and a waste of money and manpower. Money saved by eliminating this duplication of administration and services could be put to much better uses. Local conferences could be redesigned to take care of much that the unions now do. An increasing number of Adventists are following the example of Ellen White when she selected the places to which she would send her gifts.

As a second example, one that is tied to the union conferences, I would point to the church's many small colleges and universities in America. In the beginning each union conference sponsored a college, sometimes more than one. So even now the fate of each is tied to that of the other. It is unlikely that any union conference president would vote to eliminate a school in his own territory.

I owe much to Adventist education, having gone through the system, including medical school. I took my postgraduate training in surgery elsewhere. I have become especially interested in our higher educational system since retiring and being more involved in business and as a donor. But I still question: Are we as a church getting all we should out of our investment in schools? Are we utilizing our constituents'

money in the best way with our present system?

Some years ago at an Adventist Forum retreat in San Diego, Frank Knittle gave a talk outlining how consolidation of our 14 colleges and universities into one or two would benefit the church. Nothing came of his recommendations. They were timely then and more so now. The Mormon church in North America has more members than we have, and they have it right with only one large university. They retain students in their church as well as we do. If we could consolidate our colleges and universities into a few large schools, we could fund these better, get more recognition from the public, and become more eligible for grants and gifts from agencies and donors. We would also be able to attract and pay for more qualified teachers, especially those who are research-minded. They in turn could qualify for more grant money. I would recommend that, at the most, we should have one university besides Loma Linda University on the west coast and another on the east coast or in the midwest. Such a west coast institution could easily accommodate the 5,000 to 6,000 students enrolled in the present three western colleges, and the same would be true of an eastern school. When we sold the real estate and other assets of these schools we could have enough to build a really fine campus, or upgrade an existing one if that were the choice. Think what could be accomplished in better buildings, research laboratories, and endowments for students and professors.

Think of the money that would be saved by avoiding duplication of administrative offices and departments. There would still be about the same need for teachers, and they could be better paid, especially specialists in research. It would provide for additional majors such as bioengineering, a promising new field for which much grant money is available. Other possibilities not now available include drama and good museum programs.

Would such a move be attractive to students? I think so. Some people say we would lose students because they would not move out of their home area. However, in reality students move all over the world to go to school. Most are happy to get away from their home area. There is no evidence I know of that location of a college has anything to do with students maintaining their allegiance to the church. A substantial number of Adventist students go to other schools than Adventist ones.

A principal problem with effecting the change will be convincing local college boards and constituencies that the change would be good, for they now come together and make the best efforts they can to float enough money to keep their schools open. Meanwhile the schools remain underfunded and struggling. They are often kept open by one or two wealthy supporters who stipulate, "Do as I say, or else I will withdraw my support." Because of underfunding, most of our colleges operate on the lower edge, rather than at the top. To accomplish this change of mind, strong and enthusiastic leaders would be needed.

Selecting the location of the new, bigger school would also be a challenge. Although I am an alumnus of La Sierra University, I would support the appointment of an independent research group to determine which campuses would close and which stay. This group of business and educational leaders should not be alumni and possibly not even Adventists. One cannot be sentimental over what is best for the educational and investment community.

I do believe that at present LSU is in the best financial position and location for consolidating the west coast schools. Whatever campus is chosen, it should have a close affiliation with LLU to support and coordinate programs

such as bioengineering research, but at the same time it should maintain its financial independence.

How can our church make these changes happen? We have been called upon to be the head and not the tail of progress in education and evangelism. We are supposed to be efficient, wise, and business-oriented and to make the best use of our resources. This is also part of the gospel message. At the very least, the General Conference leadership would need to lend its official support, and they might even appoint something like a Five-Star General with the authority to get the process moving. If they simply appoint another committee to "study it," nothing will ever happen.

Will we do it now? The time is ripe, and the present schools are trying to add to their meager facilities. From what I have observed, a larger school or two schools would experience financial support from donors far in excess of what we now get; we have only started to tap the pool of potential donors.

Again, are we using the Lord's resources properly? Are we "occupying till he comes"? We have been told to be leaders. Can we rise to the occasion? ■

Thaine Price, MD, is a retired surgeon living in Southern California. Email: tbprice@worldnet.att.net.

Adventist Colleges Looking Up JAMES STIRLING

Thanks to the General Conference education department, the figures are now out on the current enrollments (fall 2003) at the 14 Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America. As represented in the accompanying table, with a total head count (HC) of 22,436 enrolled students, or full-time equivalent (FTE) of 18,719 (805 HC or 802 FTE more than the previous year), this represents a small gain over last year of 3 or 4 percent.

Florida Hospital College was clearly the winner, with a gain of 212 FTE students, or 31 percent. Kettering College of Medical Arts also had a respectable gain of 12 percent. Pacific Union College, with a gain of 143 students, came next with a 10.3 percent gain and Southwestern Adventist University had a 10 percent gain over a year that had registered the lowest in five years. La Sierra College was up 8 percent.

Other colleges registered more modest gains, and two registered losses: Atlantic Union College saw a drop of

13 percent and Union College one of 2.6 percent. Atlantic Union College had had another tumultuous year culminating in a change of presidency and a probationary status of accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). NEASC had earlier voted to drop the accreditation, but with the new administration and an appeal by the school, it had reversed its decision subject to changes in several areas of concern, according to a Nov. 7 communique from George Babcock, AUC president.

Comparative Fall Enrollment Report 1999-2003

College/University	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Andrews University	2,453	2,239	2,111	2,224	2,256
Atlantic Union College	476	552	552	571	494
Canadian University College	364	367	367	393	394
Columbia Union College	696	749	750	852	867
Florida Hospital College	363	374	492	680	892
Kettering College of Medical Arts	361	381	0	455	513
La Sierra University	1,098	1,235	1,341	1,511	1,633
Loma Linda University	3,045	2,989	2,951	2,947	3,089
Oakwood College	1,599	1,642	1,637	1,615	1,629
Pacific Union College	1,712	1,517	1,545	1,378	1,521
Southern Adventist University	1,593	1,817	1,908	1,991	2,007
Southwestern Adventist University	902	925	950	727	799
Union College	768	754	824	852	829
Walla Walla College	1,617	1,616	1,535	1,721	1,796
Totals	17,047	17,146	17,063	17,917	18,719

The Necessity and Utility of Antinomies

ROBERT M. JOHNSTON

An antinomy is “the bringing together of two principles, statements or laws that, even though appearing to be contradictory to or in tension with one another, are both believed to be true.”¹ Antinomies are resorted to when one single model of reality does not do justice to all the data. Since the idea that contradictions can possess ultimacy is repugnant, it is usually assumed that acceptance of antinomies is a temporary expedient occasioned by human ignorance and other limitations.

The best known antinomy in science is the two models of the nature of light, the wave theory and the particle theory. Physicists rely on one and then the other of them, depending upon which set of data needs to be explained. This is done in spite of the fact that common sense is boggled by the idea that both models are true. It is like saying that a certain stone is simultaneously both square and round. But pragmatic results seem to justify the strategy of embracing both models of light.

In Christian theology the central doctrines of the faith all involve antinomies. One of the most obvious is the doctrine of the Trinity, which affirms simultaneously that God is one and that He is three. More about this will be said below.

There are many other examples. Christology accepts that Jesus Christ is totally God and totally human. Soteriology acknowledges God’s absolute sovereignty and His initiative in man’s salvation, but at the same time assumes human free will and responsibility and the importance of personal decision. Pneumatology has to reckon with the fact that Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit being “poured out” and of certain persons being “filled” with the Spirit, and yet see other places in Scripture speaking of the Spirit as a person. Can the Spirit, then, be both an “It” and a “He”? Finally, the Scriptures are both the Word of the Lord and the words of human writers. One could multiply such examples almost ad infinitum.

Rabbinic theology is comfortable with “both/and” logic, as contrasted with “either/or” logic, but such a posture is easier to maintain in metaphysical questions (*haggadah*) than in matters of behavior (*halakah*), for while one might be able to *think* that two contrasting propositions are both true, he cannot *do* two opposite things at the same time. The paradigmatic incident recorded in the Talmud which illustrates the dilemma occurred during a debate between the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai about a disputed halakic issue. When a deadlock could not be surpassed a Bath Qol was heard saying, “The words of Beth Hillel and the words of Beth Shammai are both the words of the living God, but the halakah shall be according to Beth Hillel.”²

The development of the doctrine of the Trinity is particularly instructive. There can be hardly any doctrine of Scripture that is more basic than monotheism. The *Shema* (Deut 6:4) is reaffirmed in the New Testament (Mk 12:29-32; Jas 2:19; 1 Tim 2:5). But at the same time,

“... we now stand before a great antinomy [two seemingly contradictory principles both of which appear to be true], the two sides of which are special creation and theistic evolution. Both models can legitimately appeal to supporting sets of data, both scriptural and scientific, neither of which can be lightly dismissed.”

the New Testament is comfortably able to speak not only of the Father as God, but also of the Son and of the Spirit. This seeming contradiction did not seem to create excessive tension until the Gospel was firmly planted among the Greeks, who were more closely wedded to either/or logic. It took the Church several tumultuous centuries to work the problem through.

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To make a very long and complicated story short and too simple, the Eastern Church started with the Threeness of God and gradually worked toward the Oneness. The Eastern Fathers, such as Justin and Origen, were basically tritheists. The Western Fathers, on the other hand, began with the Oneness of God and gradually worked toward the Threeness, passing through such stages as monarchian modalism. Tertullian invented the term Trinity, but the term did not for him carry the full meaning that it did later.³ The term Trinity does not in fact resolve the paradox; it merely gives a name to it.

The doctrine of the Trinity as we know it would never have developed if either East or West had prematurely vanquished the other. Similarly, Christology as we know it would never have developed if either Antioch or Alexandria had always prevailed. A case can be made for saying that no valid theological synthesis can ever be achieved if the dialogue between two parts of an antinomy is not allowed to play out its natural course.

I propose that we now stand before a great antinomy, the two sides of which are special creation and theistic evolution. Both models can legitimately appeal to supporting sets of data, both scriptural and scientific, neither of which can be lightly dismissed. Both models have serious problems, both scriptural and scientific, which cannot be ignored. Confronted with such cognitive dissonance, there is a better way than denial. As a procedural strategy we must embrace both models. Both must be given a chance to converge. Unnatural and premature suppression of either by political means would be a tragic mistake and result in too much human debris. Searching study and civil discussion must continue as long as necessary without strident sloganeering or institutional manipulation. Spiritual division must be avoided or overcome. Gentleness all around must be exhibited. We are dealing with our scientifically oriented children. Bear in mind the fearful warning in Matthew 18:6: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." ■

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NOTES

1. Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). "Paradox" has a similar meaning but is usually used in somewhat different contexts.

2. *Babylonian Talmud Erubin 13b.*

3. A detailed account of the early history of the doctrine of the Trinity is provided by J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised edition (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 83-137, 253-79.

Walton. Walton, by all accounts, recognized that as his company matured, his leadership role was not to micromanage the company and sign every purchase order (as Danny Shelton told me he does for 3ABN) but to preserve at all costs the image of what Wal-Mart stands for: "We like you so much, we want to save you lots of money."

Like Walton, Shelton is an honor graduate of the Horatio Alger School of Success. And like Walton, Danny Shelton's father was an Arkansan, a fact attested by Danny's faint southern accent.

And, like Wal-Mart on the retailing scene, 3ABN has now surpassed its Adventist media rivals. Walton kept alive the "We like you so much, we want to save you lots of money" motif by driving his pick-up—not a jet-propelled vehicle, by all accounts—and popping in ad hoc to check up on his outlets and tell the faithful that the sky was the limit.

Though a billionaire in stock holdings, Walton dodged the pretenses of privilege and through example told the people that Wal-Mart was still in the down-home, neighborly business of saving its customers money.

Supporters of 3ABN seem to be asking the Sheltons for the same assurances. They want to hear, in word and example, that 3ABN is still exclusively in the business of saving its viewers' souls. And the Sheltons are learning that spelling out that message for a multimillion-dollar corporation is not a task for the symbolically faint of heart.

The task ahead could, in fact, call for cutting back some travel mileage and working harder to pack more symbolism into fewer visits—as Ronald Reagan did during his presidency.

Yes, there's been a new kind of turbulence at 3ABN. No one is passing out parachutes, and no one is calling for mid-air replacement of the pilot—yet. But the organization is discovering, as St. Paul learned long ago, that though all things may be lawful, not all things are expedient, or appropriate, in the grander scheme. The network can still recapture its image as the beloved David, slaying the giants of unbelief, greed, hypocrisy, and worldly entitlement with the thrifty sling of self-sacrifice.

But it will never reach the whole world with the gospel if it loses the soul of its personality. Now would be an excellent time to divest the planes—citing financial constraints.

The gesture would play well in the conservative provinces—in fact, the communal sigh of relief would be heard across the land. It's a compelling move that could do wonders for the bottom line in 2004. It's a thought the Sheltons might do well to prayerfully ponder, the next time they're in the skies. ■

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Church Apologetics *Et* Sola Scriptura

ERVIN TAYLOR

This volume is subtitled “an impassioned response to recent attacks on the sanctuary and Ellen White.” The back cover identifies the author, Clifford Goldstein, as a “church apologist.” It declares that he “examines the arguments against Ellen White and [the] pre-Advent [investigative] judgment, and responds, point-by-point.” The book had been actively publicized in the *Adventist Review*, on the *Review and Herald* Web page (where you could enter a contest to receive a free copy), and was prominently featured and promoted at Adventist Book Centers.

Two decades ago, Goldstein wrote *1844 Made Simple*, a book that he now characterizes as “a frenetic

attempt by a new Adventist...to defend the 1844 pre-Advent judgment” (p. 7). He states that the immediate “catalyst” for writing an updated and more complete version of *1844 Made Simple* was the appearance in 1996 of *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, written by a former Adventist minister, Dale Ratzlaff—or as Goldstein refers to him in a number of places in the book, “Brother Dale.”

In his introductory chapter, the author agrees with Ratzlaff about the critical importance of the heavenly sanctuary and investi-gative judgment to traditional Seventh-day Adventist theology. Goldstein

insists that, if the classic Adventist interpretation of a single Biblical text, Daniel 8:14, is wrong, Adventism is “toast” (p. 21).

In the book’s 175 pages and 7 chapters, Goldstein seeks to show that, among other points of doctrine, not only is the classical Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14 [“Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed”] entirely biblical, but also that the validity of all of the church’s traditional teachings

concerning predictive prophecy can be demonstrated completely and conclusively from the Bible and the Bible alone—*sola scriptura*! For example, although he admits that “the older I get, the less dogmatic I am about almost everything, the identification of the little horn as papal Rome is something one can afford to be obnoxiously dogmatic about” (p. 54-55).

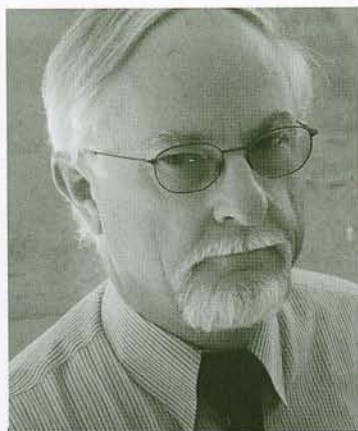
Goldstein charges again and again throughout the book that those who continue to object to conventional Adventist teachings on the investigative judgment are using refuted, outdated arguments. According to him, traditional Adventist interpretations of Daniel 8:14 as referring to the cleansing of a “heavenly sanctuary” and pointing to this event as having begun in 1844 have successfully withstood every objection ever brought against them, using the Bible and the Bible alone. In his opinion, all critics use “recycled challenges posed by Dr. Desmond Ford about two decades ago...[which] have long been answered” (p. 73), basing their views largely on Dr. Ford’s “massive (and now discredited) *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment*” (pp. 73-74).

Goldstein asserts that these definitive answers had been provided by the church’s “best theologians” (p. 7), “dozens of our best theologians” (p. 18), and “leading Adventist scholars” (p.73). These theologians, Goldstein confidently insists, published their answers to all questions and objections during the 1980s in a series of books which he refers to as the “Daniel and Revelation Committee Series.” In many respects, *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies* is a highly abstracted, popularized and

Goldstein seeks to show that, among other points of doctrine, not only is the classical Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14 entirely biblical, but also that the validity of all of the church’s traditional teachings concerning predictive prophecy can be demonstrated completely and conclusively from the Bible.

recycled version of the materials and major conclusions advanced in these books from the era of the 1980s.

Goldstein’s comments concerning Ellen G. White reflect how far official, orthodox Adventism has



Book Review of: Clifford Goldstein. *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies.* Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2003. 175 pages, \$12.99.

adjusted its publicly stated view of her over the last four decades. He is clear and unambiguous in his comments: "I can accept that Ellen White, even as a prophet, was fallible, both in her life and her writings. Her prophetic ministry, in my thinking, is not diminished if she made mistakes, grew in her understanding of doctrine and theology, changed her mind on doctrinal and theological issues [and] even, at one point, had an erroneous view of the Sabbath.... Inspiration doesn't automatically include inerrancy." However, Goldstein cannot abide any suggestion that she held an erroneous view concerning the interpretation of Daniel 8:14 and the investigative judgment doctrine. According to him, "considering the importance she placed upon the teaching of the pre-Advent judgment," she could not be "a prophet and be wrong about that. Maybe others can [accept that she was wrong about this doctrine], I can't" (p. 14).

In his concluding chapter, "The Gift of Prophecy," Goldstein testifies to his own settled understanding of the reality of White's "prophetic calling." To him, it is a "given" that she manifested the "spirit of prophecy" and that she was a "messenger from God." All this he affirms is true, but he is adamant that she is not the "foundation of my faith." That, he states, is reserved for the Bible alone. "As Adventists, when we wave the Reformation banner of *sola scriptura*, we ought to mean it" (p. 144). He admits that in his own faith journey in Adventism, it took him some time to come to the view that "not every statement, every word, every utterance of Ellen White is an eternal, terminal truth, the final word on any subject" (p. 148).

In the last section of his concluding chapter, appropriately entitled "detritus," Goldstein asks his readers to take particular note of a comment by Ratzlaff to the effect that in her more mature years, White played "a significant role in helping the Adventist church move toward theological orthodoxy" (p. 172). Goldstein finds it strange that someone like "Brother Dale," who says that White "practiced deception [and] taught false doctrine," would argue in such a way. Goldstein will have none of this. According to him, either White's "claims are true or she was a lunatic and/or a powerful liar who promulgated her insane ravings." Goldstein reminds us that she "claimed to have seen people living on other planets..., claimed to have seen, in vision, Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary... [and] claimed to have seen, in vision, life in the new earth, and on and on" (p. 172-173). He argues that "either we take her for what she was claimed for herself...or we have to reject her as a liar, a lunatic, or someone inspired by the devil." To Goldstein, "these are the only *logical* [his emphasis] options" (p. 173).

He concludes by admitting that "Brother Dale's book

has greatly affected some among us." The reason for this, he suggests, is that many Adventists are "poorly informed" (p. 174).

Commentary

The full press efforts to promote this book should alert a reader that there are influential elements in our faith community who continue to be worried about the viability of arguments supporting at least two major

The traditional Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14, together with the associated pre-Advent investigative judgment and sanctuary doctrine, is the only Adventist doctrinal teaching that is totally unique to the Advent faith tradition.

elements of traditional sectarian Adventist theology. The church's most outspoken church apologist does not write a second book on a topic and have it widely advertised and promoted in official church outlets to defend something about which there is little or no internal dispute.

The traditional Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14, together with the associated pre-Advent investigative judgment and sanctuary doctrine, is the only Adventist doctrinal teaching that is totally unique to the Advent faith tradition. No one disputes the central role these theological positions played in the core religious convictions of the founders of the church. These include Ellen White, who had a vision in early 1845 that confirmed the convictions of the "little flock" as to the meaning of Daniel 8:14. The formulation of the standard Adventist understanding of predictive Bible prophecy and the role of the corporate Seventh-day Adventist church in the contemporary world grew out of, and continues to be closely bound up with and connected to, this traditional Adventist interpretation of this single biblical text.

In addition, the Adventist church is the only major contemporary Christian body of believers that insists that Ellen White constitutes a source of reliable and authoritative religious information. Along with the traditional view that this church constitutes the visible "Remnant Church" of the Book of Revelation, these three positions constitute core elements that reflect most directly the sectarian ethos of classical 19th- and early 20th-century Adventism. On this basis, no one would dispute Goldstein's insistence that the foundation and central pillar of traditional Adventism is involved in a dispute on these matters. The stakes are indeed very high.

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Church Apologetics *Et* Sola Scriptura

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However, the first and most important thing to remember about Goldstein and how he treats this topic is that he is a self-proclaimed church apologist. There is nothing wrong with being an apologist. It is a very honorable profession and is usually well paid, if one works for the right organization. However, it is useful to know that Goldstein uses a common but successful apologetic technique to suggest only the weakest arguments against a position he favors and minimize any otherwise strong ones, while at the same time selecting the strongest arguments he can find to support his favored position.

Goldstein's assertion that arguments against the traditional Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14 have been adequately answered by the church's "best theologians" ignores the fact that those who contributed to the "Daniel and Revelation Committee Series" in the 1980s represented, both then and now, a

Even if we were to accept the questionable proposition that there is only one "correct" interpretation of Daniel 8:14, of what possible relevance might that have on how a Christian is to live now? Only those who closely identify with classical Adventism would try to find a reasonable explanation of how it would.

minority point of view within the community of Adventist professional biblical scholars. It is widely known that the authors he refers to were, like Goldstein himself, already apologists for the classic Adventist interpretations of the biblical texts, and their views were the only ones permitted in that series of books.

Is there any chance of finding common ground among differing voices in the Adventist dialogue about the most appropriate approach to interpreting Daniel 8:14? First of all, perhaps we should note that the convoluted classical Adventist system of prophetic interpretation—of which the arguments back and forth concerning Daniel 8:14 constitute only one element—might seem to most second- and third-generation Adventists as focused on an irrelevant and misguided agenda that long ago lost its grip on reality.

It was pointed out to this reviewer by John Testerman that the question, "so what?" should perhaps be applied to this topic before any other consideration. Even if we were to accept the questionable proposition that there is only one "correct" interpretation of Daniel

8:14, of what possible relevance might that have on how a Christian is to live now? Only those who closely identify with classical Adventism would try to find a reasonable explanation of how it would.

However, if we assume that such a dialogue on Daniel 8:14 is of interest, it would seem most helpful if all the parties, including Goldstein, could at least get their historical facts straight. For example, when Goldstein suggests that the views of Desmond Ford were "discredited," he grossly misstates and distorts what actually happened. Dalton Baldwin has pointed out that in the "Consensus Document" published in the "Special Sanctuary Issue" of *Ministry* in October 1980, following the Glacier View conference, careful readers discovered that a number of the statements in it move clearly in the direction of Ford's views. It is also important to note that this document was formulated and accepted by a vote as the consensus of those who attended this conference. By contrast, the 10-point "Statement on Desmond Ford Document" published in the same issue of *Ministry* was neither discussed by the entire group nor voted upon by the conference attendees; a small minority produced it. That "Statement" most certainly did not reflect the consensus of the church's theologians and biblical scholars attending the session. Goldstein is either unaware of what happened or knowingly ignores the facts.

When Goldstein says he believes that many Adventists are poorly informed on this topic, he is right. Regrettably, his treatment of it in this book does not advance a balanced understanding of the issues. If readers are interested in a more detailed and moderate perspective, they can get it from a paper by the late Raymond Cottrell (characterized by Goldstein as a "long diatribe," p. 112). Dr. Cottrell's paper can be found at www.jesusinstituteforum.org/AssetOrLiability.html. After reading that paper, each reader can determine for him/herself which source of information to trust, Cottrell or Goldstein.

Finally, this reviewer can only guess at what Goldstein had in mind when he used the word "graffiti" in his title. If he is thinking of the typically short-lived, ephemeral nature of such writing on the wall, then one might hope that thoughtful readers of the future will apply this characterization to his book rather than to the works it criticizes. ■

R. Ervin Taylor is professor of anthropology, University of California, Riverside, and Executive Editor of Adventist Today.

A Christian Aspect Review

of THE DA VINCI CODE

RON CORSON

“Everyone loves a conspiracy theory.” These are the fitting words of a Kings College librarian regarding the protagonists in this bestselling book, which has sent a ripple through the Christian community because of its Pagan, Gnostic and Cabalistic views.

Not since the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* has the church been so affected by a work of fiction. Today’s society is often more stimulated by a work of fiction mentioned in the religion section of *Time* magazine than by any scholarly work dealing with the same topic. Now with this opportunity to rewrite Christian history, the author has given the public what it loves.

The Da Vinci Code is the story of Robert Langdon, a symbologist, called into the police investigation of a murder at the Louvre museum in Paris. What he discovers is a web of intrigue between two secret societies: The Priory of Sion, and the Roman Catholic group of traditionalists known as Opus Dei. As with any good novel, historical events are intertwined with fiction to create the world the author desires. Both of the groups exist today. The author even gives the Web site of www.Odan.org, which discusses some of the rather unflattering aspects of Opus Dei.

One of the villains in this book is a large albino man named Silas. The traditionalists of the Roman Catholic Church are in a fight to the death for the Holy Grail; the Priory have it secreted away and others want it. The chief interest of the book for Christians lies in its conception of church history.

The book tells the story through the lens of Da Vinci’s painting “The Last Supper.” It tells how Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and through her his royal line of kings has been preserved. However, the mean folks of the Christian church, through the agency of Constantine, changed the matriarchal Paganism to patriarchal Christianity by demonizing the goddess worship. In *The Da Vinci Code* Jesus is just a man who many years later was raised to the status of divinity by the church. Interestingly, Brown uses a quote from the Gospel of Mary, found in the Gnostic writings from the Nag Hammadi scrolls, to show us that Mary was married or sexually “knowing” of Jesus (“the Savior knows her very well”).

Unlike the pseudoscientific *Bible Code* (Drosnin 1997) technique, known as “Equidistance Letter Sequences” (Eliyahu Rips), *The Da Vinci Code* does not offer a method

to see the hidden secret messages in the Bible. The “code” of the book is simply the hidden symbolic messages found in certain works of the Italian genius. The face of one of the figures in the Last Supper painting looks remarkably like that of a woman, and symbolically there are shapes that the author analyzes as symbols for the masculine and feminine, with hands in the painting making gestures that symbolize the removal of Mary Magdalene from her rightful place of the “sacred feminine.” The author uses “sacred feminine” several times, but never once uses

The book tells the story through the lens of Da Vinci’s painting “The Last Supper.” It tells how Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and through her his royal line of kings has been preserved.

“sacred masculine.” As with any good puzzler, the book makes use of anagrams, mirror images and interesting word puzzles that take the intrepid protagonists further toward their goal.

It is this emphasis upon the pseudepigrapha and other early Christian texts discarded by consensus of the church during the first 400 to 500 years of Christianity that has sparked so much interest. Recently *Time* magazine included references to *The Da Vinci Code* in a recent article (Dec. 22, 2003, “The Lost Gospels”) on the extra-biblical writings of early Christianity. While many Christians know that there was some controversy with Martin Luther over what he thought should be included in the sacred canon, most Christians know nothing about how the Bible actually was put together. Their lack of knowledge makes it easy for some critics to protest the exclusion of certain works such as the Gospel of Thomas from the canon. However, while Christian and non-Christian scholars have intensely examined the New Testament books, including their dates of composition, such examinations are often not considered by those who propose support for the so-called “lost Gospels.” The early Christians had to examine the writings of many different theological schools of thought. We know from statements in the New Testament that there were Gnostic beliefs which the early church fought against, so it should not be surprising that many groups tried to capitalize upon the name of Jesus for their particular theological perspective. Some of the early

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A Modest Proposal for Structural Change in the Adventist Church

George R. Knight (abstracted from his book *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, pages 178-181)

The plain fact is that the 1901/1903 reorganization is a unique governing system for a world church that has served the denomination well in propelling its outreach to the ends of the earth. It is not the basic structure itself that is problematic. Rather, the issue is whether the present structure is the most effective one that Adventism can develop for the efficient use of the church's financial and personnel resources as it seeks to complete its mission. It seems that the best option is not total rejection of the old but a combining of the best of the old with the most helpful of the new as the church, on the basis of biblical principles, modifies the essential core of its present organization for maximum missiological efficiency. In essence, that is what took place in 1901/1903. It was not revolution but a restructuring of the 1861/1863 system in order to meet better the needs of a changed church and world. That same approach is what is required as the denomination moves through the twenty-first century.

Toward a Modest Proposal

With those remarks in mind, I will hazard a few suggestions on a possible shape for Adventist Church structure for the twenty-first century. As you think about these suggestions, please keep a few key presuppositions in mind: (1) the reason for church organization is to facilitate worldwide mission; (2) any viable organization must be able to transcend the localism of congregationalism and at the same time avoid the crushing weight of overinstitutionalism; (3) an effective organization must be unified enough to focus its assets on "finishing the work" of the church yet flexible enough to let each sector of the world church employ those means that will be most effective in its field of responsibility.

One possible approach to a reformed Adventist church structure is a model consisting of three levels. Uniting the denomination would be the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in a trimmed-down state; while the General Conference would be largely a coordinating, advising, and facilitating body, it would also have a part in providing general guidelines for a world church seeking to capture the foremost advantages of both unity and diversity.

The second level of structure might consist of regional divisions of the church, somewhat equivalent to today's

world divisions. This second level of administration would not only perform the function of the current divisions but would also assume many of the coordinating and supporting tasks presently handled by the union conferences. The number of divisions might be raised to about 20 from the current 12, in order to better serve units of the world church with their own unique needs.

The third level of church structure would be what we can think of as regional administrative conferences. Here is where the most radical reconstruction is necessary. Let me illustrate by citing the North American experience. North Americans have argued for years as to whether it would be best to get rid of or combine some of their 58 local conferences or to disband their 9 union conferences. The best solution might be to do away with both levels, creating in their wake some 20 regional administrative units on one level that could serve constituencies that have moved out of the horse-and-buggy era and now have access to modern means of communication and transportation.

Similar scenarios could work for the other world divisions. Such a move would put more Adventist tithe dollars back into the work of "real ministry" and would redeploy large numbers of personnel. Many believe that the tithe has too long subsidized a massive "bureaucratic industry." The church might actually be more effective in accomplishing its mission if it spent no more than 20 to 30 percent of present administrative expenditures on bureaucracy and bureaucratic real estate and support structures. Just think of what such changes would mean for ministry and mission. They could accomplish more than all the plans developed by people behind desks in the next hundred years.

Why, you may be thinking as you look at the preceding proposal, are there three levels rather than two or four? Four is too many, in the sense that such a model is both needlessly expensive and redundant. On the other hand, two levels is too few, in the sense that such an arrangement leads to the one-person or "kingly power" dilemma that had threatened Adventism during the 1890s and has been reflected by Roman Catholicism across the centuries. The third or intermediate level (i.e., divisions) allows both for the diffusion of authority and for a coordinating body for each of the major sectors of the denomination.

Along another line, it seems that the divisions would be better as divisions of the General Conference rather than as division conferences. The church's experience with Conradi early in the twentieth century highlighted the possibility of a strong personality leading an entire division out of the denomination. The division system in its election process provides important checks and balances that have implications for both worldwide unity and regional flexibility in the sense that division officers are nominated by a committee of a largely regional nature, yet, on the other hand, delegates from all sectors of the world church must approve that nomination.

Having made such a proposal, I should point out that it is merely a suggestion for discussion's sake. No one person really knows what is best or what would be most missiologically efficient and effective. Any restructuring in the future will benefit from (1) the collective wisdom of the worldwide church, (2) an understanding of inspired principles of ecclesiology, and (3) a good grasp of Seventh-day Adventist organizational history.

In closing, we should remember that neither organization in 1861/1863 or reorganization in 1901/1903 came easy. Initial organization occurred only after a decade of struggle, and reorganization took place only after 15 years of turmoil.

Studying those eras historically has led me to the

hypothesis that Adventism makes significant structural changes only when it is on the verge of financial disaster and organizational dysfunctionality. Some believe we are approaching such a crisis. But next time organizational restructuring will be much more difficult than it was in 1901/1903 with the denomination's largely North American membership of 78,000. The stakes are higher and the complications more complex in an international church of nearly 12,000,000 members and rapidly increasing.

On the other hand, even though the challenges facing any reorganization are of stupendous proportions, so is the necessity. The time to dream dreams and make significant change is now. Change will come. The only questions are who will control that change and will it be toward more functionality or less in terms of Adventism's mission? It is wiser to take charge of the transformation process than it is to just let it happen. Perhaps the greatest question facing Adventism in the next decade is whether significant change will come about by accident or by Christian planning and sanctified action. ■

From George R. Knight, Organizing to Beat the Devil, Review and Herald, Hagerstown, 2001. Dr. George R. Knight is Professor of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Mich.

A Christian Aspect Review of THE DA VINCI CODE

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variations include the following:

Docetism: This taught that Jesus only appeared to have a human body, but did not really have one.

Apollinarianism: This held that Christ had a human body and human soul but no human rational mind, only the Divine mind.

Alogi: Because of their rejection of the writings of John and citing John's use of Logos as against the rest of the New Testament, followers of this belief regarded Jesus as mere man, though miraculously born of a virgin. They taught that Christ descended upon Jesus at baptism, giving Jesus supernatural power.

The Ebionites, in the interest of representing monotheism, denied the deity of Christ and regarded him as the son of Joseph and Mary, a mere man who was qualified at his baptism to be the Messiah.

Gnosticism and Jewish Cabalism cover a lot of territory and may be summed up imprecisely as emancipation by acquiring hidden knowledge. While many of the other views have completely died out, Gnosticism and Jewish Cabala as well as Christian Cabala have had a resurgence in adherents.

Determining which writings to include as genuine and which to reject as spurious became a long-studied task of the early church. One can often find early church fathers

making reference to books which a few hundred years later were not respected by any Christians. It would be an oversimplification to say, as the book does, that Constantine by his influence at a council chose the Christian canon. *The Da Vinci Code* uses this simplification of church history, along with Paganism, Gnostic writings and Jewish Cabalistic thought, to create the image of goddess worship. This was drawn from primitive fertility rituals and cults of ancient times, emphasizing the female deities.

What *The Da Vinci Code* provides us is an opportunity to reexamine our Bible. The time has come in America when people will not be satisfied simply to hear, "This is what the Bible says." Critics may ask, "Which Bible?" In many ways we Christians have become lazy, not caring to know how we arrived at our own Holy Scriptures. Often we have taken traditions as if they are God-given instructions, but when pressed by critics we would not know how to explain how these support our faith. Christians have often ignored or downplayed reason, even though it is to reason that we must appeal when we say how we arrived at our sacred canon. Hopefully informed Christians can step up and defend their religion, not only to skeptics but to those who are looking for spirituality in previously less well known philosophies. Education may be the key to our witness for God. ■

A New Look at Sabbath School

GORDON SHORT

A core feature of Sabbath keeping for Seventh-day Adventists is congregational worship and study on Saturday mornings, expressed in Sabbath School and sermon time. For many people these two periods are a time for listening to familiar themes told and retold, with little opportunity for response and creative thinking. A critic once noted that in Sabbath School there is no progression, especially in the adult classes; no intellectual excitement. Some feel stifled by this environment and lose interest in attending.

Potentially this period could be a time for spiritual and intellectual growth and stimulating discussion by thinking people who come together regularly to listen, reflect and make discoveries. I am proposing a way to change this environment, especially for young college graduates and professional people in the church. Sabbath School can become a place in which people look forward to gaining new perspectives for themselves and for friends whom they might invite.

That way is through the recording of presentations by leading thinkers in the church—college Bible teachers and other theologians, as well as people with other areas of experience. With the many forms of electronic media available today—audiotape, videotape, CD, DVD—it should be possible to prepare half-hour presentations of material that could be replayed in Sabbath school classes. Following such a presentation the audience could then engage in discussion and probing of the subject.

Various features of the church would have to be used to make this possible, especially at the colleges and universities. Selected faculty members would prepare series of lectures on subjects at the leading edge of Adventist thought. Communication technicians would take down these lectures in preparation for making the copies for distribution. College administrators would approve the use of their facilities and their institutional name. Advertising would be promoted in the various church journals and related publications like *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*. Pricing would have to be set to cover the cost of production and distribution and administrative expenses, as well as some royalty for the lecturers. Viewers might be persuaded to support the purchases. Possibly even church administrators could be persuaded to give approval of the project.

So what would be the implications of such an enterprise? Aside from the enhanced spiritual and intellectual experience of Sabbath School members, this program would enable the colleges to find a point of contact with their alumni and other educated Adventists. It could be part of a program of lifelong learning and intellectual enrichment. It could also help colleges keep their alumni records more up-to-date and complete. And if this program

were to be widely adopted, it would counter the drift toward fundamentalism that affects the thought of many of the churches not in touch with centers of higher education.

Possible topics

Here is a list of possible areas of thought that would interest the intellectually curious Adventists:

- Christian approaches to the physical environment.
- Ethical behavior in various situations.
- The church's program of education on various levels.
- Courtship, marriage, home and family, divorce, remarriage, sex and reproductive choices.
- Domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- Church history, tradition and proposed structural changes.
- Adventist doctrine and theology.
- Standards of behavior and attire.
- Gender relations, roles, equality.
- The church as a community, and in its relationship to the larger community.
- Leadership and followership and critical thinking as responsible members.
- Earth science, time in earth history, evolution.
- Creation and the Flood of Noah.
- Social environment of early Adventism.
- The church and civil government, with relationships to military action.
- The Bible in its original historical and social setting.
- Ancient manuscripts, biblical and extra-biblical, like the Dead Sea scrolls and Nag Hammadi finds.
- Myths and legends of the Bible.
- AIDS and the church.
- Genetic manipulation, including therapeutic cloning.

Conclusion

This is a sketch of what might be done. Whether it would "fly" depends on many different factors. Perhaps a limited trial run in different formats might show which would be most acceptable and also turn up flaws needing correction—or even whether it would catch on at all. But at least it would be a start for thinking about how to improve the environment for Adventists who want to grow in their spiritual and intellectual life while still in the community of like-minded friends. ■

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