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Adventist *Today*



IS GOD

Immoral?

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Church Institutions Are Not Necessarily Christian

J. David Newman

Is the primary goal of a church institution different from that of its secular counterpart?

For example, is the primary mission of a Christian hospital to heal the sick? Or of a Christian nursing home to care for elderly people? Or of a Christian school to provide a good education? Or of a food factory to make health foods? If the goals are the same for Christian and secular institutions, what makes them different?

Some will argue that the difference lies in the environment. If so, is an institution Christian because it is staffed by born-again Christians? Is a school Christian because it requires all students to take religion classes for graduation, or because prayer is offered at the beginning of class? Should there be any difference between a Christian institution and a humanist institution that espouses high ideals?

Others will say the primary purpose varies from institution to institution. One institution's purpose may be to shelter people from the realities of the world; another may exist to provide employment for the church's members; another's main value may be as a source of income for the church.

What Is Unique

What is unique about a church institution? If there is no uniqueness, then there is no need to call it Christian. Is there a common thread that ties all church institutions together?

This question is not academic. An institution's primary mission will determine the methods used to run it. The mission will make a difference in policies. It will help determine who is to be hired and what will be emphasized. It will determine whether the church should even be in that business.

The life of Christ helps answer this question. What was Christ's primary goal? Was his goal to heal the sick, feed the poor, comfort the afflicted? Did Christ perform his miracles to satisfy only a physical need? Did Christ divide his life into segments: one of

teaching and preaching to convert people to God, and the other of healing and helping people for good's sake, without any other motive?

The primary goal of Jesus is succinctly recorded by Luke: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32, NIV). According to Matthew, Christ's mission was to preach "the good news of the kingdom," and part of his method was "healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23, NIV). Could it be that the primary mission of a hospital is not to heal the sick, but something else? Could healing the sick be a means to a greater goal?

Some will become uncomfortable at this stage and mutter something about disinterested benevolence. "We should do good for good's sake," they say, "and leave the rest to God." "We don't want people to have the idea that there is a hook in everything we do."

Disinterested does not mean "uninterested," but rather "unselfish." All Christians must be obedient to the commission of Matthew 28 to "go and make disciples of all nations" (verse 19, NIV). As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." If this is true on the individual level, is it also true on the institutional level?

Corporate Rather Than Individual

The purpose of a Christian institution is to do corporately what cannot be done individually. If there is no specific Christian focus, then it is no longer unique. It may be a church institution, but it is not a Christian one.

For example, a hospital takes ill people and seeks to make them into well people—finished! A Christian hospital says wait, we have an eternal perspective as well as a temporal.

If this is so, then it means that a Christian hospital's approach to patient care will be totally

Continued on page 30

"The success of the institution will be measured not by a worldly standard, but by God's standard: what contribution has it made to preparing people for eternity?"



Kudos for *Adventist Today*

Since 1958, I've subscribed to the *Review* (under its various titles: *Review and Herald*, *Adventist Review*). For the past 40 years, I've subscribed to *Spectrum*. Since 1993, I've subscribed to *Adventist Today*. Today I'm reading recent copies of *Adventist Review* (often the 36 issues published each year reach Australia in small bundles), along with the Fall 2009 issues of *Adventist Today* and *Spectrum*.

Right now, I'm interrupting my reading to write to you, because I want to shout: "Thank God for the dependent and the independent press in the Seventh-day Adventist community!"

Each of the three magazines I've named command my immediate attention the moment they arrive in my mailbox. I admit that I don't read every article in the *Review*; after all, some of them are rather predictable. That is not a criticism; the magazine is for the entire, diverse Adventist family. We expect it to report from the bridge of the Good Ship Adventist.

The voyage would be much less engaging without *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*. The independent press can probe issues and share perspectives that may

not even appear on the official radar. It can propose analyses and even solutions that "the bridge" declines to admit or refuses to discuss, even though it quietly accepts some of them in a decade or two. (Note, as one extended example, the hundred best articles *Spectrum* has published about the life and writings of Ellen White.)

Adventist Today (Fall 2009) takes us to the core of the tithe issue, equips us to read George Knight's most-controversial book, reminds us of the unfinished business we have from 1980, and invites "all three kinds of Adventists" to live in community here, until we "revel together before God's throne, singing his praises through all eternity."

Let me add that even the right-wing, independent publications have a place: I need to know why my brothers and sisters are so disturbed. Reading their writings may be both depressing and frustrating. But it is essential if I am to relate to my "spiritual relatives."

I have confidence (established since 1993) that the Adventist Today Foundation will maintain the quality of *Adventist Today*. I can hardly wait for the "fairness, candor, and good taste" that the next magazine will apply to "contemporary issues of importance" for the church we love.

ARTHUR PATRICK
Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia

Fatal Accounts

I am appalled by your unqualified endorsement of David Dennis in "Turning the Other Cheek" (Winter 2010). That you would call it an honor to publish and promote his book belies your existence as an independent journal "following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism," and "striving for fairness, candor, and good taste" in reporting on

issues involving the Adventist Church.

The circumstances surrounding the termination of Mr. Dennis, and the allegations made against him, are a matter of public record. Yet you say he "was fired because he took a stand against the misappropriation of funds and misguided policy." You have provided him a platform to tell his side of the story, while never hinting that another side exists.

For those of us acquainted with that other side, your ignoring it is both damaging and painful. While I do not relish airing the church's dirty linen, if you are going to do so, you must conduct a thorough and fair investigation that holds all leaders (including Mr. Dennis) accountable for his/her actions. In this case, there is a much larger and more tragic story that deserves to be told.

In his commentary, Mr. Schwisow writes: "As we begin a new year at *Adventist Today*, we are committed to building up the church by showing a better, more Christian way of behavior on behalf of God's children." Who are those children? Are they not the young members, the innocent, the trusting, the powerless? Jesus says [in Matthew 25:40], "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these ... you have done it to me. I cannot begin to convey the pain you have caused again to 'the least of these' in your misguided zeal to expose the wrongs of the organizational leadership."

As an independent journal, you have set for yourself a high ethical and moral standard, which when compromised not only harms people but also causes you to lose your credibility.

On behalf of those who have been needlessly harmed, I would ask that you have the courage to make amends whatever the cost.

KARIN L. MCLARTY
Enumclaw, Washington

In the Winter 2010 edition, Ed Schwisow's commentary sounds like a *Scab Sheet* [underground newspaper in Oregon in the late 1960s] from the supermarket. Why would he write about something that happened 20 years ago and make a big issue about it? There must be up-to-date news. Sure, we want honest auditors and leaders. All of his questions and comments make us wonder if our leaders and auditors in the denomination are honest. It seems to me he could look for something more recent and something more than one man's opinion. That kind of gullibility is really atrocious.

I have lived long enough and sat on enough boards to know that at times one person can upset the whole board and make it miserable to serve. That person can leave the board and write a book. *Adventist Today* can pick it up, print it, and make a big issue about it, but that doesn't make it truth or fact. It most likely would be exaggerations and lies. One man's twisted opinion, no matter how brilliant he is, does not make his material truth.

I am also amazed that strapped *Adventist Today*, with its limited funds, would print this book and mail it to all of us. I believe someone paid *Adventist Today* to print it and mail it. I know I don't want my funds used this way.

ELLSWORTH WELLMAN
Yakima, Washington

I recently received and read what I assume was a complimentary copy of *Fatal Accounts* that was sent to readers of *Adventist Today*. While I have no reason to disbelieve the allegations made in the book, I feel it was highly unfortunate that it was authored by Mr. Dennis himself. It comes across as a diatribe from someone with a deep grudge. I wish a third party with a journalistic approach could have written an unbiased report on the issue.

Sadly, I feel this book can appeal only to those who possess a predisposition for intense and destructive criticism. My sympathy goes out to Mr. and Mrs. Dennis for such an inglorious and acrimonious end to a career devoted to the church. I hope someone can find a more constructive way to make their case known that will lend itself to fair hearing and reform.

CATHY MORGAN
Holland, Michigan

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The publishers of Fatal Accounts are weighing the responses that have come in concerning some of the revelations in this book. We will report in the next issue what action, if any, the publishers will take.

Darwin's Sacred Cause Revisited

Adrian Desmond and James Moore perform incredible spin as they attempt what might be one of the most culturally correct rewrites of history in history. The concept that Darwin's "sacred cause" was to restore the black man his human dignity is beyond ludicrous.

T. Joe Willey, who reviewed the book (Winter 2010), is a master of "the understatement," saying: "Perhaps Desmond and Moore overstate the 'sacred cause' behind the scientific writings of Darwin ..."

Do you think? Perhaps? Mr. Willey creates an unnatural amalgamation of two thoughts in his thesis as he states: "Darwin believed that humans could be traced to a single ancestry and that all races belonged to the same human family." The first is true; the second is not. Contra to Ellen White's animals-and-humans-getting-confused business, Darwin did believe in a line of continuity, but he considered blacks not far enough on that line—not quite human yet. As

with all transitional forms, he thought, they would be naturally supplanted by the superior races someday.

He wrote: "At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes ... will no doubt be exterminated. The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the negro or Australian and the gorilla." (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Vol. 1, chap. 6, 1871, p. 201.)

Evolutionist Dr. Stephen Jay Gould frankly states: "Biological arguments for racism may have been common before 1859, but they increased by orders of magnitude following the acceptance of evolutionary theory." (*Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, 1977, p. 127.)

The biology text at the heart of the infamous Scopes Trial, written by George William Hunter, states: "At the present time there exist upon the earth five races or varieties of man ... the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America." (*A Civic Biology: Presented in Problems*, 1914, p. 196.)

There was nothing sacred about Darwin's "cause," although ironically he did oppose slavery, possibly along the lines of "treating animals humanely." Bottom line: for ideological expediency, we must not rewrite history, religious or scientific.

DARREL LINDENSMITH
Mandan, North Dakota


C O V E R S T O R Y

IS GOD **Immoral!**

Another look at *Why evil?*

By Desmond Ford





SOME READERS OF RECENT BOOKS BY FORMER JESUIT JACK MILES, especially his *God—A Biography*, have been challenged regarding orthodox Christian beliefs about right and wrong, an inspired Bible, and a righteous God.

Miles set forth a God who only gradually evolved to morality and cites the Old Testament to illustrate his case. Miles has swayed some of my friends, and I confess to being horrified by what seems to me comparable to the surrender at Singapore in 1942. (The Japanese were almost out of ammunition and could not have continued Singapore's siege more than a few more days. But "pacifist" British generals surrendered prematurely—to Churchill's indignation.)

Here is a quote from Miles, a Process theologian, cited by Ruth Tucker:

"The plot begins with God's desire for a self-image. It thickens when God's self-image becomes a maker of self-images, and God resents it. From this initial conflict, others emerge. ... Why did God create the world? Why, on flimsy grounds, did he destroy it so soon after creating it? Why, having so long shown no interest whatsoever in the wars of mankind, did he suddenly become a warrior? Why, having attended slightly, if at all, to morality, did he become a moralist? As his covenant with Israel seemed to break down, what consequences seemed to loom for him? What kind of life awaited him after that impending breakup? How did he adjust to his failure to keep his promises he made through the prophets? What is his experienced life as a being without parents, or spouse, or children?"¹

This is somewhat typical of many Process theologians who believe in a finite God. And the quotation is a key to all that follows in this strange book by Miles. It carries the mark of the cloven hoof—the denial of the supernatural in the origin of Scripture, and the theory that the Bible by its moral and scientific errors disqualifies an omniscient God as its source.²

Mystery of Evil

The issue at stake is one form of the mystery of evil. But philosophers are agreed that evil itself would be no problem if there were no God. All moral outrage is irrational unless the background premise of thought is the existence of Deity. So it is belief in God that creates our problem regarding evil in all its forms.

J.S. Whale commented: "It is our religious sense, our certainty of God, which makes this problem of evil so real. The keenness

of our scandal at innocent anguish comes not because there is no God of Comfort but because there is. We have seen His splendour shining in the face of Christ upon the Tree; and we know."³

What Old Testament grist do Miles (and atheists in general) use? Favorite passages are Numbers chapter 31 and 1 Samuel chapter 15. The slaughter of the Midianites and the Amalekites seem at first glance entirely heartless and beyond justification. Many things in the Law of Moses invite criticism. But things are not always what they seem.

Of course there are other difficult passages also, such as Jael's slaughter of Sisera and Jephthah's dealing with his daughter, and the closing chapters of Judges. But there is absolutely nothing in the Old Testament so horrifying as our Lord's words recorded in Mark 9:42-49: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ... And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ... And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. For every one will be salted with fire" (RSV).

Love and Punishment

The Lord of love himself spoke more pungently about the punishment of evil than any of his predecessors or successors. Perhaps we should remember the platitude from Old Testament exegetes: God threatened many things so that they might not happen. In other words, fearful warnings are intended to turn us away from doing wrong. This is also true of jarring historical accounts.

Nevertheless, we are confronted with dreadful things that DID happen. What about them? Possibly the first note to be made is that Christians have long been aware of the moral challenge found in such passages, and answers have been bountiful and rational. The second thing that should be said is that the Bible contains 31,175 verses, and the percentage of ambivalent or ambiguous ones on morality by a generous reckoning does not

exceed 3 percent. Are we to interpret the 97 percent by the 3 percent, or vice versa? Isn't it rather strange that critics of the evangelical faith seem blind to most of Holy Writ, while a tiny proportion of it is magnified in their eyes?

Our Lord himself has told us that there were things in the Old Testament record that were permitted because of "the hardness of their hearts." We do not have the right to expect New Testament morality in all its wonderful maturity in primitive ages.

H.L. Hastings, a well-known Christian debater of earlier times, could write at length on "The Wonderful Law" of Moses because he read in it standards of goodness that surpassed all contemporary cultures. His writing is quoted at length, because only a few people would have access to this volume. Keep in mind that these words were penned in the 19th century, and some words and concepts differ from those familiar to us more than a hundred years later.

Old Testament Irrelevant

"Now it is asserted in various quarters that the Mosaic law and the Old Testament writings connected therewith are absurd, obscene, and oppressive; and that the acts done under that

"We are told that the Bible is a bad book, obscene, indelicate, and unfit to be read." – H.L. Hastings

law, and professedly by divine direction, were, in themselves considered, unjust, unwise, and unworthy of the character of a great and good Creator and Governor. Others, on the other hand, of equal intelligence and acquaintance with the facts in the case, make directly opposing assertions. In such circumstance, to what conclusion shall we arrive? The difference cannot be in the law; it must be in the men who read it. Both look at the same landscape; some see one class of object, and others see things entirely different. Which class sees things as they are? Or are both mistaken in their view of things?"⁴

"It is charged that the Jews under the Law of Moses were guilty of great immoralities. But why should they be blamed for that? If the laws enforcing purity and forbidding vice were fabulous and deceptive from beginning to end; if the teachings of Jesus Christ are entirely void of all authority; why should *not* men disregard all such imaginary restrictions, and conduct their affairs after their own sweet wills? Monkeys, apes, and baboons have exhibited no particular squeamishness concerning matters of this kind. ...

"If the Law of Moses is a fable, a forgery, and a fraud, then the principles contained in that law cannot be used by infidels to impeach or accuse the men to whom that law was given. If there *are* no principles of truth and righteousness and justice; if we have nothing to guide us but the instincts derived from brutal ancestors; then on what principle can we question or condemn any act committed by any person, under any circumstances? There is no law, and there can be no transgression. But if we admit the existence of a God, and if he has implanted law in the human heart, or inscribed it on tables of stone, then we have a basis upon which we may argue."⁵


"We are told that the Bible is a bad book, obscene, indelicate, and unfit to be read. Before this grave charge can be established we must consider that the Bible was written in a different age and country from our own. ... Customs differ in different countries; and what is improper in one country may give no offense in another. So there may be a simplicity, or even a barbarism, of language, which, though indelicate to our ears, may have been entirely consistent with purity and propriety at the time and in the countries where it was written. ...

Not the Words of Moses

"Again, the words that appear to us indelicate in the Bible are *not* the words *written* by Moses or the prophets, but they are English words used by the translators; and they are words which were used in respectable society when the Bible was translated in 1611, that is, in the time of Shakespeare. And for every expression in the Bible which seems objectionable, we could probably find a dozen in the writings of Shakespeare which would not pass current in modern society."⁶

"The Law of Moses countenances no such cruelties and barbarities as flogging women and children, or any one else for poverty or begging. In its enactments principles of humanity prevail. If we compare the Jewish law with the customs of the nations around them, the difference will be manifest. The kings of Israel had no "burning, fiery furnace" for the punishment of offenders, like the king of Babylon; no "den of lions," like the Medes and Persians. They were not accustomed to bore out people's eyes or cut off their hands, like the Assyrians. The Law of Moses knew nothing of crucifixion, which was practised among the Romans. ... It knew nothing of punishment by torture on the rack, or breaking on the wheel, of impaling, of flaying alive, of roasting over a slow fire, of drowning, of exposure to serpents and wild beasts, of tearing to pieces by wild horses, of drawing and quartering, of exposing upon the gibbet, of fixing human heads and hands over gates, on walls, or in public places; or any of the similar cruel and horrible inflictions which abounded even in civilized countries almost down to the present time.

"The punishments prescribed by the Law of Moses were restitution, stripes, the sword, and stoning; and in certain cases



burning was inflicted, but this is not said to be burning *alive*, but was probably the burning of those who had been previously put to death. Persons *after* being slain, were sometimes hung up, and thus publicly exhibited; but they were not to remain exposed overnight, but must at once be buried. . . .

“Of course a code of martial laws, for the government of a people just escaped from slavery, in a country where prisons, jails and reformatories were unknown, and where punishment must of necessity be summary, would necessarily differ materially from law established under different circumstances. But in spite of all these difficulties, the Law of Moses must still be regarded as a law where mercy rejoiced against judgment.”⁷

“This law—‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’—stood as a perpetual guardian over the poor. It counted every man’s person sacred. Brutal men are cowardly, and such a law as this naturally restrained their brutality, and protected the helpless against assaults and violence.”⁸

Punishment Merited

“The nations of Canaan had forfeited their right to live. They were utterly debased and brutalized. Incest, bestiality, and every form of the grossest vices was prevalent among them. . . . What must have been the state of Canaanitish society, when the exceptional depths of horrible crime which startle civilizations were but the *dead level* of their ordinary life? And these were not the crime of individuals, but of *society* as a whole. There was no punishment for them; no law could reach them; the government itself was corrupt. Their very religion was corruption itself; their worship was lust and debauchery. All was one mass of reeking pollution. . . . Only the judgments of God could purge the guilty land.”⁹

Hastings also discusses the horrors found in the last chapters of Judges, the vast difference between slavery among the Israelites and that of other countries, the Cities of Refuge, and the laws preventing robbing the poor and establishing great conglomerates.

Does the Bible itself give us a clear explanation of why such things as happened to the Amalekites and the Midianites were fully justified? Yes. Read the closing verses of Leviticus 18, where God warns his own people that if they followed the immoral ways of the Canaanites, they themselves would endure a similar fate (the warning follows a list of the horrible obscenities practiced by the Canaanites):

“Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before

you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you” (Lev. 18:24-28, NIV).

Divine Holiness

Clearly God is no respecter of persons, and what we call his “wrath” is merely the reaction of divine holiness against all that is evil and destructive.

Is the contention of Miles that there is a gradual evolution of goodness in the Old Testament God to be taken seriously? I have just completed a six-year study of the Old Testament preparatory for preaching from Genesis to Malachi. I wonder if Miles has ever read Hosea or Jonah. These books show a concern both for God’s own sinning people and the immoral heathen that can make the careful reader weep. But even in the Bible’s opening books, there are pictures of God that fulfil any Christian standard. For example, read Ex. 34:5-7 after considering Spurgeon’s comment on Gen. 3:8:

“But now, the Lord himself comes forth to Adam, and note how he comes. He comes *walking*. He was in no haste to smite the offender, not flying upon wings of wind, not hurrying with his fiery sword unsheathed, but *walking* in the garden. “In the cool of the day”—not in the dead of night, when the natural glooms of darkness might have increased the terrors of the criminal; not in the heat of the day, lest he should imagine that God came in the heat of passion; not in the early morning, as if in haste to slay, but at the close of the day, for God is longsuffering, slow to anger, and of great mercy; but in the cool of the evening, when the sun was setting upon Eden’s last day of glory, when the dews began to weep for man’s misery, when the gentle wind with breath of mercy breathed upon the hot cheek of fear, when earth was silent that man might meditate, and when heaven was lighting her evening lamps, that man might have hope in darkness: then, and not till then, forth came the offended Father.”¹⁰

God of the Old and the New

When we remember that the Jehovah (Yahweh) of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New, we will avoid the error of making one cruel and the other kind. It was through the Son that the Father communicated his will prior to, as well as after, the Incarnation.

Let us now get down to specific cases. Why were the Canaanites, the Midianites, and the Amalekites wiped out? And why did God choose to let Israel be the executioner rather than famine or plague or earthquake?

There are no novel answers to these questions. For centuries the same explanation has been given, and that explanation is only an enlargement of Leviticus 18. Take, for example, the comments of Thomas Scott, the Anglican preacher converted to the gospel

by John Newton. And see the more recent comments by Jamison, Faussett, and Brown; Christopher Wordsworth; Alveh Hovey; and R. Tuck—all written well over a century ago.

On 1 Sam. 15:3, Scott wrote: “The Amalekites had long before been condemned, but the nation had been spared, till it had filled up the measure of its iniquities. The righteous Lord certainly did no injustice to individuals; and the example was of a salutary tendency, to deter others in future ages from ‘meddling to their own hurt’ with the servants of the living God.”¹¹

Guilty Punished

Scott comments on Num. 31:14-18 as follows: “The sword of *war* should spare women and children, as incapable of resisting; but the sword of *justice* knows no distinction, except that of guilty or not guilty, and more or less guilty. This was the execution of a righteous sentence upon a *guilty* nation, in which the women were the principal criminals; and perhaps particular instructions had been given on this head: therefore Moses was angry, when he found that the women had been spared. If those concerned in the detestable project of Balaam had been preserved as captives, they would have been a constant temptation to the people and they could not be known from the rest except by miracle. Orders were therefore given to put all the women to death, and the male children, and only to spare the female children who could not

It will stop at nothing to deny the presence of the supernatural.

be supposed to have been culpable; and who, being brought up among the Israelites, would not tempt them to idolatry. It has been groundlessly asserted that Moses authorized the Israelites to make concubines of the whole number of female children, or even promiscuously to debauch them; and a formidable objection against his writings have been grounded on this strange supposition. But the whole tenor of the law and especially a statute hereafter to be considered proves the contrary (Deut. 21:10-14). They were merely permitted to possess them as female slaves; while all the laws concerning marriage and concubinage, and against fornication and whoredom, were in full force, in this, as well as in other cases. But what shall we say of the execution of all the male infants who could not personally be guilty in this matter? ... Had they lived, they might have conspired to avenge the death of their parents on Israel: and the example was thus rendered more tremendous, warning parents not to imitate the guilt of the Midianites, lest they should involve their beloved offspring in destruction. ... It should also be remembered that children are

constantly involved in the desolations occasioned by famines, pestilences and earthquakes.”¹²

More recently we have contemporaries like Derek Kidner and others who have written similarly on these themes. See, for example, *The Hard Sayings of the Bible* by Kaiser, Davids, Bruce, and Brauch.

When Secularism Rules

Secularism rules modern society and much of religion. It will stop at nothing to deny the presence of the supernatural. Thus men wrest the Scriptures and thereby destroy the branch of hope and faith on which all are poised, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

Every paragraph of Christ’s teachings has its seed in the Old Testament. He came to testify to a Truth already existing (see John 18:37) and affirmed that “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35, NIV). He did not deny the presence of parable, metaphor, anthropomorphisms, and other literary forms in the Old Testament, but he categorically denied any theory that refused to see in the canonical writers God’s inspired penmen.

Adolph Saphir makes this clear: “These direct references to Moses and the prophets—so numerous, so striking, so solemn, and so comprehensive—must be taken in connection with the more concealed allusions to Scripture thoughts and teaching, with which Christ’s discourses are replete. In his sermon on the mount, in the discourses recorded in the Gospel of John, in his conversations with his disciples, in the parables, there is scarcely a thought which is not in some manner connected with the Scripture. All Christ’s thoughts and expressions have been moulded in that wonderful school of the testimony which God had given to his chosen people.”¹³

The question put by Abraham in Gen. 18:25 (NIV): “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” is answered correctly by all who have come to know Christ and him crucified. Only those who have gladly chosen to do the will of God can discover the truth on issues of moral debate. See John 7:17.

AT
Desmond Ford, retired Adventist theologian, with doctorates from Michigan State University and the University of Manchester (UK), writes from Shelly Beach, Caloundra, in Queensland, Australia.

¹ *Walking Away From Faith: Unravelling the Mystery of Belief and Unbelief*, p. 57.

² For a detailed study of Jack Miles’ work, look up the review by CRI (The Christian Research Institute) on the Internet. For this article, I touch only upon the supposed carelessness regarding morality by the God of the Old Testament.

³ *The Problem of Evil*, p. 9.

⁴ H.L. Hastings, *Will the Old Book Stand?*, pp. 62-63.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 11.

¹¹ Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (see 1 Sam. 15:3).

¹² *ibid.*, (see Num. 31:14-18).

¹³ Adolph Saphir, *Christ and the Scriptures*, p. 10.

THE CANVASBACK CONSPIRACY

A Tribute to Sydney Allen

BY EDWARD ALLEN

When I was asked to write an obituary for my father, Sydney Allen, I was invited to highlight his contributions to Seventh-day Adventist theology and polity. I could easily tell the story of his life, but I didn't think I was competent to judge his theological and political contributions until I began to review his self-published 1977 parable, *The Canvasback Conspiracy*.

Each symbolic element in the fable represented some aspect of Seventh-day Adventist theology or polity. Not only were the elements appropriate, but the issues raised were the major ones that the church was facing at the time. Instead of writing a sketch of my father's life, I have chosen to review the storyline of *The Canvasback Conspiracy* in order to show my father's opinions about church theology and polity and, in retrospect, to reveal the truths of his prophetic voice.

The Rumble in Remnant Valley

The story is set around Hospice Lake in Remnant Valley. The Valley is ruled by the Coyotes, who take one out of every 10 eggs from the ducks who nest there. The originators of the lake are Mother and Father Beaver. After hearing Magpie's

suggestion for a huge Dam, Mother Beaver has a dream about a Dam and insists that the whole valley organize to build it according to her "Wonderful Plan," which she claims is original with her. The Coyotes decide that the Valley will be organized as a "Den-o-mine Nation."

Some of the symbology is crystal clear. For example, eggs represent money. Mammals, who cannot fly and who are confined to the Valley, represent denominational employees.

Birds, who can fly and can choose to stay away if they wish, represent non-denominationally employed church members. Canvasbacks are physicians.

It is also clear that Ellen and James White are represented by Mother and Father Beaver, Willie White and Arthur White are conflated into the figure of Benny Beaver, and John Harvey Kellogg appears to be Magpie. Loma Linda University is described as a School of Hydrology.

Mother Beaver's authority is central to the story, but the fable states that it doesn't matter that she first heard the idea for a Dam from Magpie. She wasn't being dishonest in saying that it was original with her. Her dream "was so ecstatic,



Sydney E. Allen (1929-2009)

Sydney Early Allen, Jr. was born on August 17, 1929, in Fallon, Nevada. He graduated from La Sierra College in 1950. He served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a pastor and evangelist from the time of his graduation until 1957. He then began a nearly 50-year career in education, teaching first at Union College (1957-1964), then at Philippine Union College (1964-1969), Loma Linda Academy (1971-1975), and San Bernardino Valley College (1975-2004). He received a Ph.D. degree in Philosophy from the University of Nebraska in 1964, writing his dissertation on the idea of revelation in the thought of Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. He loved the Loma Linda University Church and sang in its choir for 30 years. He is survived by his wife, Jean, of Redlands, California; sons, Earl of Broomfield, Colorado, Edward of Lincoln, Nebraska, Eric of Whitehorse, Yukon Territories, Canada, and Evan of Las Vegas, Nevada; and daughter Esther of New York City.

and came in response to such a deeply felt need that she simply forgot Magpie's sardonic remark" about the need for a Dam (p. 11).

Old Man Coyote is a pivotal figure in the events. He resembles former General Conference President Robert H. Pierson. Former GC Vice President Willis J. Hackett seems to appear as Timber Wolf, and past President Neal C. Wilson is

• This must be a Valley of Loving Workers.

- Mother Beaver is always right.
- Coyote is infallible.
- One out of 10 eggs is to be reserved for Coyote (p. 13).

Some years after the Dam is completed, it springs a leak. Old Man Coyote says that Mother Beaver decreed it be patched with twigs. Eagle, the superintendent of

talk with Owl about his allegation that Mother Beaver lied about originating the Wonderful Plan. Badger tells Owl that "a lot of little truths of the kind you retailed can add up to a big lie." It is a little truth that Mother Beaver borrowed some of the Wonderful Plan from Magpie, but in telling that truth, Owl is giving the impression she is dishonest. That is a big lie. Mother Beaver took "a handful of *sawdust* and

The issue of more lay involvement in the governance of the church seems to resolved. All of Ellen White's writings are now readily available

portrayed as Skinny Coyote Pup. Other figures resemble professor Ronald L. Numbers (Owl), the head of Loma Linda University (Eagle), and the head of Loma Linda's medical school (Canvasback). I must add that these really are guesses, since I never spoke with my father about the precise identification of these animals. When I first read the fable I might have guessed who the nefarious Ferret was, but I no longer have a clue.

Father Beaver

At the beginning of the story, Father Beaver motivates the animals with his motto "Work is the cure for everything." While the work on the Dam is going forward, he dies. Mother Beaver then seems to have a change of heart about the motto. She agrees that work is important but begins to teach that "Love, not work, is the cure for Anything" (p. 12). Dissension in the Valley over this change in emphasis is resolved only when her son, Benny Beaver, begins to teach that "We ought to be a Valley of Loving Workers."

The Den-o-mine Nation agrees to five new rules:

- Work is not the cure for everything.

the School of Hydrology, can't believe that Mother Beaver taught such a thing. He wants to see Mother Beaver's plan but cannot, because it is kept out of sight in Benny Beaver's lodge. Eagle secretly patches the Dam with large, stout logs and then covers them with a veneer of twigs to fool Coyote. It takes a long time for Coyote to discover the ruse. In the meantime, Owl, who teaches at the School, begins to spread the story that Mother Beaver's Wonderful Plan really came from Magpie. Coyote becomes suspicious of all that is happening at the School. It seems that no one there believes anymore that Mother Beaver is always right and that Coyote is infallible. He sends Black Footed Ferret out to investigate. Ferret snoops around everyone's nest and eventually he ties Eagle to Owl, a damning connection since Owl clearly does not believe in Mother Beaver. Coyote forces both of them to resign their leadership posts.

The Author Enters His Story

My father disguises himself in the tale by taking the appropriate name of Badger. Badger is depicted as having a

turned it into a *mountain of gold*." Without the Beavers, Magpie's idea would have been stillborn (p. 29).

Mother Beaver's Authority

The discussion of Mother Beaver's authority continues when Coyote summons Badger for a visit. Badger tells Coyote that he is claiming too exalted a status for Mother Beaver and for himself. Badger argues that any claim to absolute truth shows a person to be a Quack, like those in Mecca, Salt Lake, and the Kremlin. Badger notes that Benny Beaver claims that his Mother "always spoke the absolute truth, unmixed with error." But according to Badger, "that makes her into a kind of Ground Hog. The principal virtue of a Ground Hog is that he is always right about a perfectly trivial question." If you see Mother Beaver as 100 percent right about trivia, you miss out on her deepest concerns. According to Badger, "The true test of Mother Beaver is not whether she was an infallible forecaster, but whether her sayings hold water" (pp. 30-31). For a Den-o-mine Nation based on Hydrology, that is the crucial issue!

Badger has become aware that Canvasback, the chief instructor of

Hydrology at the School, receives income from consulting outside the Valley. Few of the animals know this. Coyote wants to use this fact to discredit Canvasback. Badger suggests to Canvasback that a threefold agreement be made. First, Owl will stop exaggerating every misspelled word in Mother Beaver's sayings. Second, Coyote will stop claiming there are no misspelled words in Mother Beaver's

have been largely at the click of a mouse.

works. Third, Canvasback will reveal his true income and assure all that he is receiving no greater resources than the Canvasbacks do at other Schools of Hydrology. Canvasback agrees that if Coyote will end his mad "Beaverolotry," he will divulge his income.

Coyote refuses to accept this agreement. He insists on keeping a lid on Mother Beaver's sayings, for fear of what might come out if they were all revealed. It is apparent to Badger that Coyote is the one who is preventing peace in the Valley. He suggests to Owl and Canvasback that Coyote be held accountable.

But what happens next is a surprise. Coyote engineers the banishment of Owl, Eagle, and Badger. He growls that any animal that sympathizes with them will also be banished.

Canvasback Takeover

It doesn't take long for Canvasback to take an egg and aim it directly at Coyote. He ducks the egg but then resigns in favor of Timber Wolf. The animals revolt against the idea of accepting a Wolf's leadership, and they then support Canvasback as he makes seven demands: (1) that ducks


have a say in the operation of the Valley, (2) that all of Mother Beaver's sayings be made available, (3) that Mother Beaver's sayings be edited so that their context is clear, (4) that the commandments about Mother Beaver's and Coyote's infallibility be abolished, (5) that the practice of snooping in the animal's nests be stopped (6) that the attempt to tell animals who can make new nests and who cannot must be stopped, and (7) that all working policies be based on the Mottoes "Love is the only cure for Anything" and "All animals are equal and none is more equal than others."

Canvasback and the other waterfowl cut their egg allowance to the Coyotes to only one egg in 20. This has an effect. Coyote agrees to remain until his term is up rather than turn the leadership over to Timber Wolf, Skinny Coyote Pup takes over more of the responsibilities of running the Valley, and peace eventually returns when all of Canvasback's demands are met. Surveillance of the animals stops. The waterfowl return to the one-egg-in-10-for-Coyote plan. In the end, the fable ends rather abruptly without much detail about how peace was made. On the last page, it is reported that Badger has begun to take flying lessons but will probably not solo until he can learn which way is up.

Ellen White Authority

While money and its allocation are certainly part of the story, the basic issue that *The Canvasback Conspiracy* deals with is the authority of Ellen White. I believe it was an issue that my Father struggled with personally. We see here a description of how he came to terms with it. We also see his suggestion for peace in the denomination. It is fascinating to see how prophetic his prescription was. The issue of more lay involvement in the governance of the church seems to have been largely resolved. All of Ellen White's writings

are now readily available at the click of a mouse, though no one has yet produced a scholarly edition that describes their context. The church as a whole no longer sees Ellen White's writings as infallible, and the church leaders are no longer seen to be infallible after numerous instances of moral and financial impropriety. Church leaders seem to have abandoned the practice of snooping around to check people's orthodoxy. Divorce and remarriage, which were very live issues for my Father, are no longer seen to be major sticking points for church employment. And finally, love and forgiveness as well as equality seem to have greater sway in our day than in his. Though some might disagree, it seems to me that the church has made progress in the last 32 years.

Like his *nom de plume* Badger, my father did learn to metaphorically fly on his own. Having lost his church employment and membership due to his divorce and remarriage, he received an income from 30 years of teaching at San Bernardino Valley College. It seems that he also discovered which way was up. Though he was never again employed by the denomination, he was faithful in his church attendance and remained exceedingly loyal to the basic ideals of the Seventh-day Adventist church. When he was re-admitted to church membership some 12 years after being put out, he felt the church had recognized its mistake and restored him to a fellowship he had never deserted. His affection for the church is evident in *The Canvasback Conspiracy*, and he never abandoned his feeling that all the good things that had come into his life had come by way of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. 

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PROPHECY and SCARE TACTICS

By T. Joe Willey

An evangelist's son questions the use of urgency and fear to bring people into the church.

ONE SPRING AFTERNOON I WAS CLEANING out my garage and came across what looked to be an aging roll of evangelistic placards, posters, broadsheets, and banners propped loosely in the corner and tied with a rope. The bundle had the appearance of a forlorn ancient scroll, dirty with dust, water damage, and edges nibbled away by mice. I carefully unrolled each paper and spread them out on the garage floor. They looked interesting and carried some kind of symbolic logic. On each I placed a rock or stray piece of wood to hold down the corners, as they kept trying to resume their previous state. I saw that these old posters and placards highlighted favored Adventist eschatological themes during World War II. The gallery included:

- Is Hitler the Antichrist in the Bible?
- Armageddon War...Is it Here?
- The Great Red Dragon...
- Mussolini Heals the Deadly Wound

- Do You Have the Mark of Beast on Your Forehead?
- All the World Under One Flag
- A Thousand Years of Peace. When Is It Coming?
- How Near is the End the World?

These religious objects belonged to my father. He had been an Adventist evangelist during the war and later. Back then he traveled along the Oregon Coast and around Astoria, saving as many souls as any man could—a warrior for God. Looking at the group of placards spread out on the floor gave me an idea, so I called him up. “I have something to show you, Dad,” I said. “Can you come up to the house?” I gave him no hint that I was about to punish him.

Dad Arrives

He lived in Loma Linda, retired among other heroic mortals he knew previously in the work. Soon I heard him coming down the street. It was a clear day, a time of happiness and content. Parking in the driveway, he got out of his car and came walking into the garage, excitedly telling me about Hank Aaron's home run hit off Dodgers pitcher Al Downing in the Atlanta Braves stadium. Dad loved baseball as strong as any fan. His mother denied him the opportunity to try out for a minor-league baseball team in Minnesota when he was a young man, instead pushing him into becoming a preacher. Aaron had just broken Babe Ruth's record, and his mother came out on the field and ran the bases with him. Dad was about

halfway into telling me about the terrible unsportsmanlike insults Aaron had received after overtaking Ruth's record. Suddenly he stopped talking, looked down at his feet, and began studying the posters laid out on the garage floor. He walked around each sensational proclamation used in the past to attract infidels to Adventism.

For a long time he said nothing, but I could tell something festered in his mind as he bent over to look at one and then another. Some posters caused him to wrinkle his face, and I guessed that he was probably starting to live backward as he scrutinized the advertising. The largest placard, which I had placed in the center of the floor, had bold red letters across the top and a menacing picture of the devil sitting on a rock with his legs tucked up under his chin and lightening and dark clouds storming in the background. The poster read: **The Devil Boycotts These Meetings!!!**

Standing there, my curiosity sprang up—the temptation too much—and I broke into his thoughts. “How did you use this poster, Pops?” He continued standing in silence, gathering up bits of strewn memory, and then he cocked his head to one side like a raven that has just seen its image in a mirror.

“We rented a bright-red devil suit with horns and a long, curved tail from a Halloween costume store downtown,” he said. “The deacon in the church put on the devil suit and walked back and forth in front of the tent, carrying this sign over his shoulder. He had a pitchfork in his other hand. People would drive by,

slow down, gawk, then speed away like misfortune was about to strike. At first the deacon got to jumping up and down on the sidewalk, shaking his fist, and frightening people away. So we had to subdue his ardor as a pretend devil. Some came in out of curiosity. If they listened to 10 sermons, we gave them a free Bible.”

Apologize for Scare Tactics

Laughing, I could imagine the whole thing and wondered if Dad advertised that he had a cure for St. Anthony’s fire as well. We continued talking about how an evangelist in his day gathered precious souls for the kingdom of God using shifting prophetic headlines. After a time I jokingly asked him, “Pops, I know you never meant to scare anyone using fictitious prophecies, but have you ever thought about taking out a full-page ad in *Newsweek* or *Time* magazine? You could apologize to the general public for frightening them with false and troublesome prophecies that were so readily replaced by new canvases of eschatological artworks after the war.”

The kind of man who enjoys a ribbing, my dad put his hands in his pockets and looked at me firmly with his jaw set. “I need to explain something to you, young man,” he said, using a quaint Scandinavian accent he liked to mimic. “Prophecy cannot fail and does not fail for the committed! Prophecy is used to show that the world is governed by Providence. The bows and arrows found in Ezekiel are changed in modern times to tanks, rockets, and atom bombs. When people start believing that prophecy fails or they

lose their prophetic enthusiasm, their convictions soften and they are likely to stay in the church simply because the church becomes institutionalized with many layers of management and security. Viewed this way, such an institution likes long-term commitments from the congregants, but not the prospect of imminent danger or the end of the world.”

I wanted to get more out of him and garner his wisdom. But after a time he sidestepped the more perplexing moral questions about using scare tactics in creating urgency and fear, especially the kind of failed prophecies that were used before and during the war around sudden and possible complete termination of Earth history. Christians have kept faith with the idea that the world is just about to end, and these ideas have a long history in modern American culture. Despite this, I probably couldn’t have gotten a better short answer about the psychology of Adventist prophecy than what he’d just given.

Hope for Eternal Life

The strident voices of the sure word of prophecy in my dad’s time, both before and after the war, had “God’s timepiece” ticking off the remaining minutes until the end of time. Dad used an image of a clock set at a few minutes till midnight. Just as back then, many evangelists who look for the end of the world reject the present one and fantasize a divine realm or new order under the sovereignty of God. An important factor in this memory is the hope for eternal life beyond the grinding uncertainty of the grave. They place

themselves under God’s exclusive favor as his chosen, and as the ones who know his will and don’t expect at the end of time to be disappointed. They reject outsiders and doubters and show considerable animosity toward society around them. The world is a wicked place and needs purifying. Eager to demonstrate the “truth” in their new line of prophetic reasoning, they work to evangelize others. They create new posters and clever devices to direct people’s attention to the promise of an ordered experience that gives ultimate meaning to the lives of individuals caught up in history’s stream.

Deep down, there is something everyone yearns for—a place where, as Revelation 21:4 describes, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

This is the enduring appeal of evangelism and prophecies of the end of time. But the latest formulations must be created and given by others, as my father passed away in September of 1990. He is buried in North Dakota, near the homestead where he grew up and next to the ball field where he learned to throw base runners out whenever they tried to steal second base. AT

T. Joe Willey received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, in neuroscience and was a postdoctoral fellow at New York University in Buffalo. He taught neuroscience at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine.

I HAVE NEARLY COMPLETED AN EXTREMELY INSPIRING BIOGRAPHY on William Wilberforce. This man, who was at the forefront of the abolition of slavery in Britain (and, really, the world), has become a giant in my mind—not that he was anything less before reading the book. But there is a sobering component of his life that has given me great pause.

Soon after the British parliament overwhelmingly voted to abolish the slave trade—which came more than 20 years after Wilberforce initially introduced the bill—Wilberforce wondered about slowing down and retiring from his prestigious post in the House of Commons. After all, he now had six children at home and felt as though he needed to devote more time to them.

BY SHAWN BRACE

CHANGING *the* WORLD

One acute example of his unfortunate dilemma was an earth-shattering experience he had with one of his children.

“Once when Wilberforce picked up one of his little sons, the child had cried,” writes Eric Metaxas, “and the boy’s nursemaid had helpfully explained, ‘He always is afraid of strangers.’”¹ The minute I read what the nursemaid said, I was cut to the heart. As a new father, and a pastor who is not satisfied with the status quo, I wondered about my own ministry, my own family life, my own ambitions.

This little anecdote suddenly produced a question—one that had always been buried in the recesses of my mind but had not explicitly surfaced until this sobering account. That is, can a person “change the world” and still maintain a flourishing family life?

World or Family

The truth of the matter is that it seems as though some of the world’s most influential and successful people have been near failures in raising their own children. I can remember talking with a young lady whose father was a well-known and influential preacher. I could sense the sadness in her voice when she shared with me that whenever her family went on vacation, her father spent most of his time with his nose in a book. Now, many years later—and after she spent a number of years “wandering in the desert”—I could still sense the pain that resulted from such neglectful behavior.

Then my mind turned to the counsel the apostle Paul shared

with the Corinthian believers when he wrote, “He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife” (1 Cor. 7:32-33, NKJV). For the most part, this passage had always puzzled me. But in light of Wilberforce’s experience, and observing the lives of other “successful” individuals, I can see why Paul would make such an assertion.

Truth be told, this is a “thinking out loud” article that is a reflection of my own questions as I work through the dilemmas of the direction of my life. As I said above, I have a new son that I am crazy about. I can remember a few months ago when I flew across the country for a speaking engagement. It was the first time I had done such a thing since he was born. And as I walked into the airport and looked back at him—staring out that car window as he sat in his car seat, wondering where his dad was going—it absolutely broke my heart. And I thought to myself, “I never want to do *this* again.”

And yet, though I am in no way blinded by ambition or intoxicated with significance, I am not happy with mediocrity when it comes to my ministry. I *do* want to make a difference on

a much larger scale. I *do* want to reach my potential for God in a way that will be instrumental in vindicating his name in this whole great controversy with Satan.

Three Options

It seems as though there are only three options when it comes to a person's desire to make a large-scale difference in the world while at the same time having a family life. The first option is that the person is mediocre at both. His or her energy is split fifty-fifty between the two arenas, thus not making a huge difference in either. The second option is that his or her family life flourishes, with the parent spending large amounts of time building up the

The third option is that the family is essentially neglected while the person plays the hero outside the home. Sadly, I think most “successful” people choose this third option.

family but not making much difference outside the family. And, of course, the third option is that the family is essentially neglected while the person plays the hero outside the home. Sadly, I think most “successful” people choose this third option.

And yet, maybe there is a fourth way. Maybe a person can truly change the world *precisely by devoting most of his or her time to family*. And I'd like to use my own father as a very modest example of this concept. You see, my dad is a pastor—a very committed, hardworking, and devoted pastor. I would not say, at all, that his professional ministry has been unsuccessful or that he hasn't “changed the world” to some degree. But the truth is that over the course of his ministry he had many, many opportunities to “climb the denominational ladder” and take pastorates that would place him in much higher positions of influence. But over and over again, he turned those opportunities down.

He did this for two reasons, I believe. The first reason is because he has a huge burden for ministry in New England—and, more specifically, Boston. Pastors are lining up by the dozens to minister in other parts of the country where the work is “easier,” but Boston—which is, perhaps, the most secular city in America and where the work is “floundering” across denomination

lines—has very few takers. And most of his 30-plus years of ministry has been spent there.

Ministerial Rarity

The second reason—which has perhaps never been explicitly mentioned—is because he made family life a priority. Consequently, I lived in the same house from the age of 2 until I moved out for college—something that is very rare in a minister's family. And I think that stability went a long way in my own development. Now, don't get me wrong; it was very common for my dad to spend 60 to 80 to—who knows, maybe 100—hours a week doing “church work.” But my sister, brother, and I never felt as though we took a back seat. And he was always deliberate about making sure his children—and his wife—knew that we were the most important people on Earth in his mind.

One evidence of this, which remains fixed in my mind, is the long hours we would spend together on Sundays, playing hockey on the ponds. All three of us children—my sister included—would lace up our skates and take to the ponds to spend 5 or 6 hours playing innocent games of hockey with others from the community. (And, just as a side note: my dad was also doing a masterful job of ministering to others in the process, often befriending those we would see on the ice week after week.)

And what has been the result? All three of his children are walking with Christ to this day. (Of course, my mother also had a *huge* part to play in this whole thing.) Are we perfect? Far from it! But I, for one, would listen to all of the “horror stories” from other PKs (pastor's kids) and feel as though they may as well have been telling me about a trip to the moon. What they were describing was so different from what I had experienced growing up (and I believe my siblings would say the same thing).

I think my dad is changing the world precisely because of his commitment to his family—as well as his undying commitment to an area of the “field” that is a hard part of the vineyard to labor in.

And that is a model I could live with. AT

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¹Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace*, p. 221



Jesus said unto them, I say unto you, I am the
flesh of the Son of man, and
his blood, ye have no
eateth my flesh,
blood, hath eternal
raise him up at the
flesh is meat indeed,
rink indeed.
eateth my flesh,
blood, dwelleth in
living Father hat
by the Father

Open Communion?

Then Why Not the Kids?

By James Coffin

In many Christian denominations, communion is a closed event. Only adherents to that faith are allowed to participate. By contrast, Seventh-day Adventists practice an open communion. We invite any who have accepted Jesus as Savior to participate in this celebration of redemption.

The fact that someone may not have been baptized by immersion isn't considered an obstacle. Nor is the fact that a person doesn't subscribe to Adventist theological understandings. In fact, each person determines for himself or herself whether or not to participate. Except for the children, that is. Typically, the children are excluded.

Granted, when Jesus celebrated the first communion with his disciples, no children participated. And in most denominations, including most Adventist congregations, children still don't participate—until they've been baptized (or confirmed).

Of course, if we make too much of the fact that children weren't present in the upper room, we'd need to exclude women as well. That first communion was definitely an all-male, all-adult event. But somehow I get the idea that God would want both women and children to join in this celebration of deliverance from sin that Jesus has made possible.

Passover

Let's note some history.

The first communion was merely an addendum to the Passover supper, which was a celebration of physical deliverance from slavery in Egypt. In fact, one important purpose of the Passover was to promote discussion between parents and children about the wonders God had wrought on behalf of his people.

In Exodus 12:25-27, we read God's instructions to Moses: "When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony [the Passover]. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians'" (NIV).

Further, the instructions given by Moses to the Hebrews included: "Go at once and select the animals *for your families* and slaughter the Passover lamb" (Exodus 12:21, NIV, emphasis mine). Moses states that "each man is to take a lamb *for his family*, one for each household" (Exodus 12:3, NIV, emphasis mine).

And he even suggests that "If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are" (Exodus 12:4, NIV). It definitely sounds like a "kids/everyone welcome" activity—not just for Mom, Dad, and the other adults.

Did you know that in the NIV, the word "children" is used 404 times? In addition, "child" appears 109 times, "boy" is found 79 times, and "girl" is used 59 times. The Bible seems to have been particularly interested in the younger set. And the Passover wasn't the only memorial given in great measure for the benefit of children.

Memorial Rock

Interestingly, when the Hebrews miraculously walked through the flooded Jordan River on dry land, Joshua commanded that a representative of each of the 12 tribes take a huge river rock from

the riverbed to set up a memorial to commemorate this grand event. “In the future,” Joshua told the people, “when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (Joshua 4:6-7, NIV). The whole exercise of gathering the memorial rocks was for the kids.

All too often children are given short shrift in a broad range of spiritual activities these days. But Jesus didn’t seem to go along with that practice. In fact, Jesus seemed to have particular concern for the often-ignored members of society. As a result, it wasn’t uncommon for him to associate with women, with the poor, with the socially disadvantaged, with people considered to be great sinners ... and with children.

When mothers brought their youngsters to Jesus to be blessed by him, Christ’s disciples thought it a colossal waste of time. So “the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me,

understand why I was told to close my eyes and talk to Someone I couldn’t see? Not really.

With the passage of time, I memorized a few prayers. And later, I was able to construct them myself. But still I had hazy understandings. (In fact, I still do. As the Apostle Paul says of all of us, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror Now I know in part”) But my parents operated on the assumption that faith and understanding don’t always have to precede actions. In the developing child, actions can precede faith and understanding.

God Not Offended

So even though going through the exercise of prayer initially had no real meaning, so what? The understanding was going to come eventually. And not for one moment do I believe that God was offended because a little kid was assuming postures and mouthing expressions far beyond his ability to comprehend.

But, some might ask, aren’t little children **too young** to understand the meaning of communion? **Certainly. But so what?**

and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:13-14, NIV). Excluding children didn’t set well with Jesus. It made him “indignant.” He definitely had strong feelings about it.

Asking Questions

So, in the light of how the Passover was practiced in the Old Testament, in light of the Bible’s care to establish natural springboards so children will ask questions of their parents about spiritual things, in light of the importance Jesus placed on children, would he find it offensive for children to participate in a ritual that provides wonderful opportunities for their parents to talk to them about salvation? Good question.

But, some might ask, aren’t little children too young to understand the meaning of communion? Certainly. But so what? Let me explain. When I was an infant, sitting in my highchair and unable to talk, my parents folded my hands when we had the blessing on our food. Did I understand what it was all about? No way.

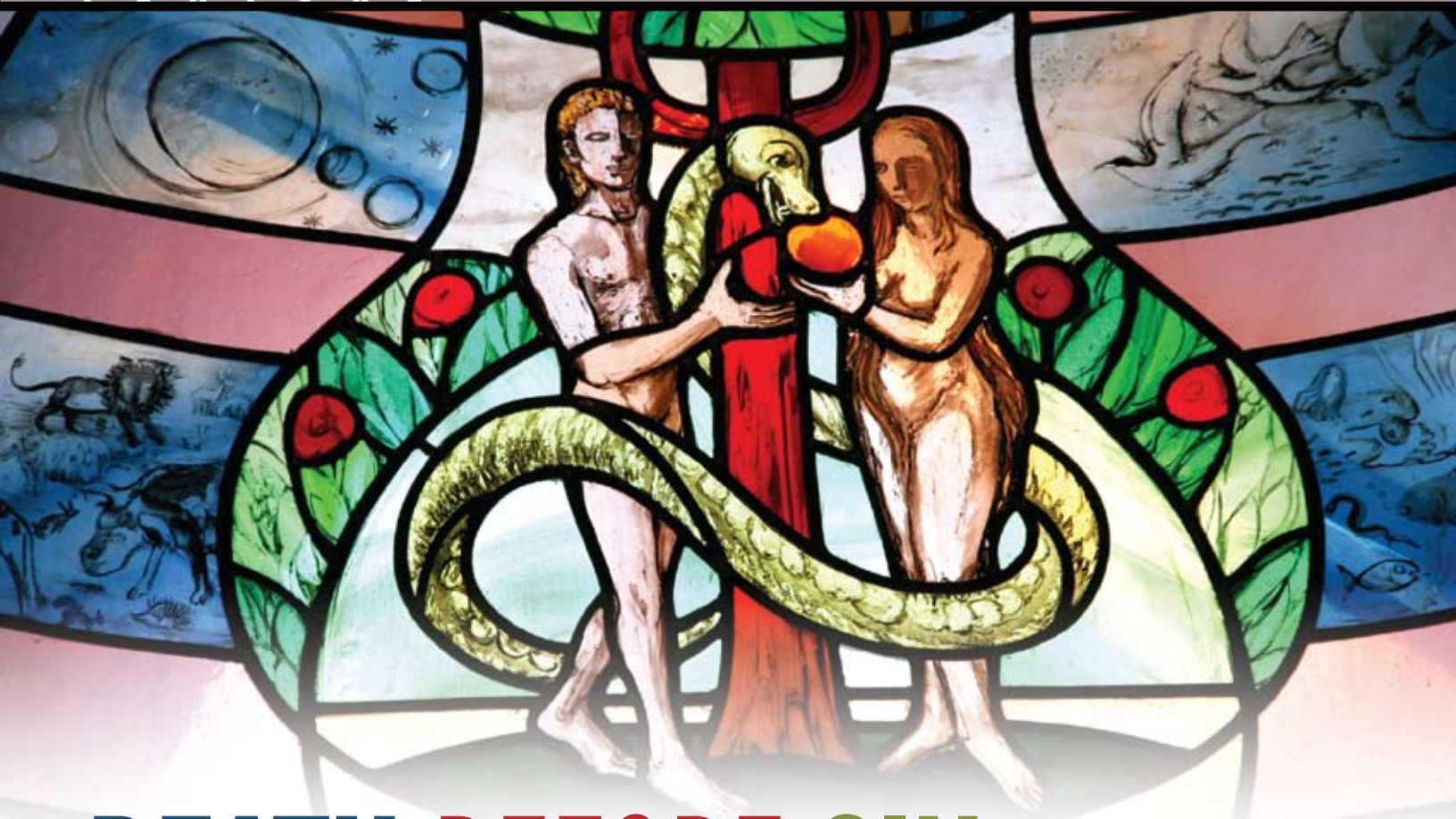
As I grew older, my parents took the process a step further: I was invited to participate in a repeat-after-me prayer. Did I

Keep in mind that prayer is a repetitive activity. The meaning will become clearer and still clearer. No problem. So why isn’t the repetitive activity of communion seen in a similar light? Why is it assumed that there must be near-perfect understanding of the symbolism before a child can participate? Why are spiritual-novice adults welcomed while little children are excluded?

By contrast, baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime event. Baptism is a one-time statement before God and witnesses about my acceptance of and commitment to Christ as my Savior. So baptism would be inappropriate for a 3-year-old. The person being baptized needs to have a relatively detailed understanding of this singular experience for it to have the meaning it should.

Communion is in an altogether different category. Like prayer, it’s repetitive. And as with prayer, even if I’m only going through motions because I don’t yet fully understand, that’s no problem. I’ll have an entire lifetime for my understanding to grow. **AT**

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DEATH BEFORE SIN

Is It Supportable From the Bible or Ellen White?

By Ole C. Olesen

In 1999, one of the quarterly adult Sabbath School lessons was on Creation. I was part of a pastoral team in a large congregation that took turns teaching a “Pastors’ Class,” and I drew the short straw to teach “Death Before Sin?” We all recognized that here was a crucial discussion in the larger debate about deep time vs. a recent creation and worldwide flood.

I knew my class (bright, educated, inquisitive, skeptical, hopeful individuals) and decided to explore the implications of believing that there was physical death before Adam’s fall. I still have my original PowerPoint presentation.

Does the Bible Allow It?

The first fundamental question was whether or not one could remain rooted in the Bible and still believe that death came before Adam’s sin. Paul’s famous verses certainly seemed like a barrier.

• Rom. 5:12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned . . .” (NASB).

• 1 Cor. 15:21-22: “For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (NASB).

When the Genesis stories are included, it’s pretty clear that the Bible makes the following claims:

- Death comes from sin.
- Sin came into the world through Adam.
- Man was locked away from the source of life.
- Thorns and thistles are linked to the curse on the ground.
- All creation was subjected to decay.

Does Ellen White Allow It?

The second big question for a Seventh-day Adventist is whether or not there is any “wiggle room” to believe other than what Ellen White so clearly writes in her opus:

- Man did not evolve from earlier life forms.¹
- Suffering and death came to plants and animals by man’s sin.²
- All fossils were formed after Adam’s fall, by the Flood.³

Somehow I put together a whole collection of passages from both the Bible and Ellen White’s writings that open up “wiggle room”—only to be faced with the logical consequences of interpreting them as allowing death before sin.

Gen. 2:8: “The LORD God planted a garden toward the east,

in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed” (NASB).

- The garden was not the whole earth.
- The garden was a special “planting” of God.
- Man (Adam and Eve) lived only in the garden at first.

“When the tide of iniquity ... determined [men’s] destruction by a flood of waters, the hand that planted Eden withdrew it from the earth. But in the final restitution, ... it is to be restored...a sample of what the whole earth would have become, had man but fulfilled the Creator’s glorious plan.”⁴

• When Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, the rest of the earth was not yet what God intended it to be.

• The difference between Eden and the rest of the world cracks open the door to explore what those differences may have been.

“...the tree of life...had the power to perpetuate life.”⁵

“The fruit of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden possessed supernatural virtue. To eat of it was to live forever. Its fruit was the antidote of death.”⁶

“In the midst of the garden stood the tree of life, the glory of which surpassed all other trees. Its fruit looked like apples of gold and silver, and was to perpetuate immortality. The leaves contained healing properties.”⁷

Right about now in my preparation of the lesson, I began to feel a lot like some of the rabbis who celebrate hidden meanings in the Scripture. Either that, or perhaps I was experiencing a bad case of eisegesis. Nevertheless, I plunged ahead. As I focused on the underlined phrases above, these observations and questions arose:

- Adam (in his sinless state) benefited from an antidote to death?
- Eve (in her sinless state) needed leaves with healing properties?
- No other creatures within the garden seem to have been invited to eat from this tree. Did they derive deathless life from Adam?
- Was there plant and animal life outside the garden, living and dying without access to Adam or an antidote to death, since the rest of the world had not yet become what God intended it to be?

Death in What Sense?

The next big question takes us back to 1 Cor. 15:21, which says, “by a man came death,” and Rom. 6:23, which says that “the wages of

sin is death...” What death is the Bible talking about?

• In John 11:4, Jesus (speaking about soon-to-be-resurrected Lazarus) said: “This sickness is not unto death.”

• Even though we die and go into the grave, 1 John 3:14 says: “We know that we have passed out of death into life” (NASB).

• In Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, the father proclaims, “This my son was dead, and is alive again” (Luke 15:24), even though the wayward young man had always been “alive.”

• Since Eph. 2:5 says that “even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ” (NASB), should we call being “born again” the real “first resurrection”?

• 1 Tim. 5:6 says: “But [the widow] who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives” (NASB). Was fallen Adam ever dead while he lived?

All of these observations led me to these thoughts:

• The “living dead” [us before salvation] are “dead” in the sense that we do not yet have eternal life—and still remain accountable to God at the appearing of Christ.

• Animals are never “living dead” in this sense. They live and die with no promise of eternal life—and no accountability to God. (Yet I still fantasize that God has a place in eternity for those animals that have so blessed us.)

• If the “death” that came by Adam’s sin was “second death,” then there may be room to consider “animal death”/“first death” before sin.

• Ellen White wrote: “The penalty ... is not merely temporal death, for all must suffer this. It is the second death, the opposite of everlasting life.”⁸

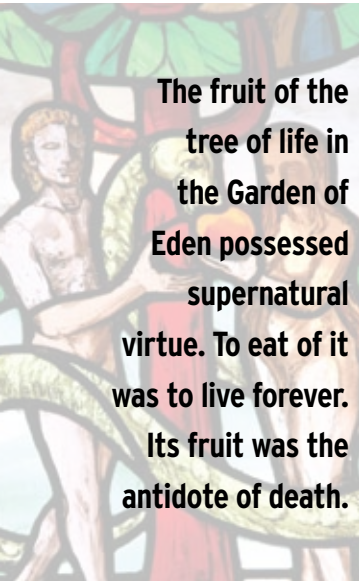
Startling Implications

Some time after presenting the above-mentioned Sabbath School lesson, it came to my attention that there is actually a reference by Ellen White about Adam’s fall that seems to speak to this issue. Her story is eerily reminiscent of the ancient Jewish legend of Adam’s first wife, Lilith:

“Love, gratitude, loyalty to the Creator—all were overborne by love to Eve. She was a part of himself, and he could not endure the thought of separation. He did not realize that the same Infinite Power who had from the dust of the earth created him, a living, beautiful form, and had in love given him a companion, could supply her place. He resolved to share her fate; if she must die, he would die with her.”⁹

My eyes opened wide at the implications:

- Adam did not have to sin when Eve sinned, and the



The fruit of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden possessed supernatural virtue. To eat of it was to live forever. Its fruit was the antidote of death.

implication is that Adam should have divorced Eve and relied on God to “supply her place.”

- If Adam had chosen this course and had not sinned, Eve alone would have suffered the consequences of sin, even death.
- Her death would *not* have come “through one man”!
- Hence, in this curious footnote to the story of the fall, there *should* have been death before Adam’s sin (i.e., Eve’s death).

Instantly, of course, there springs to mind the question of whether fallen Eve would have been offered a renewed gift of life through a Savior, or whether there would have been no need of salvation, since *Adam* had not sinned. Is it possible that God would then do “the best thing for [her] that a compassionate God can do. He [would let her] be as though [she] had not been.... [She would not] suffer the second, most awful death”?¹⁰

Was Adam’s choosing to join Eve the primordial sin that inflicted all humans with the curse of original sin? Was this the sin that necessitated the death of the Son of God? Or could we, in a revisionist mindset, view Adam’s identity with Eve as heroic as Moses’ identity with the children of Israel when, after God offered to start over with Moses (Ex. 32:9-10), he said to God, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! ... But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Ex. 32:31-32, NIV)? But I digress.

Minority Picture

What kind of picture would we have to live with if these distinctly minority interpretations of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White were to become our norm?

- “Creation week” could easily cease to be a six-day event, even though clearly written with that viewpoint in mind.
- The Garden of Eden could be seen as an outpost, a heavenly beachhead on a planet already filled with life and death (but not second death)—a promise of what the whole world could become under Adam’s dominion. (Note the strong parallel to Adventist expectations that the Holy City, New Jerusalem, will arrive on earth, surrounded by Satan’s final rebellion, at the end of the Millennium.)
- The “death” brought by Adam’s (and Eve’s) sin could be seen as that of “second death”—accountability before our Creator—rather than “temporal death, for all must suffer this.”
- The origins of death and fossils could predate Adam and Eve.
- Any such pre-Adam, “temporal” death could be seen as originating on earth after the fall of Lucifer; hence, after sin—just not Adam’s sin.

- The atonement of Jesus as the Messiah could then be focused on Adam and Eve and their descendents as well as a world that still agonizes for “the Creator’s glorious plan” to be fulfilled.

- Finally, sharing the good news of the gospel could need to include admitting that God somehow tolerated eons of adaptation, predation, disease and extinction, before initiating his plan for eternal life in the Garden of Eden.

- We could feel forced to become “agnostic” (if not evolutionary) as to the origins of “natural” life that predated Adam.

I could live with some of these scenarios. Others I dislike intensely. Honestly, I would much prefer the “short story” version of Creation and Redemption over the *War and Peace* version. I love the thought that Earth’s story began a few thousand years ago and is quickly moving toward its beautiful future.¹¹

In summary, there appears to be a little “wobble room” for a longer story than I like. It appears to me that a believer can still treasure the Bible and value Ellen White even though one is convinced that there was life on earth millions of years ago. Many who attended my Sabbath School class expressed their appreciation that I had opened that possibility. (Sharing these thoughts with a larger audience will allow their first “peer review” beyond the classroom.) I am glad they still enter into Sabbath each week in honor of their Creator. I am glad they long for the next invasion of earth: the second coming of Jesus. I anticipate sitting with them at the feet of Jesus when he reveals to us the full story—long or short—of this world we call home. **AT**

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¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs & Prophets*, p. 45.

² *ibid.*, pp. 66, 443.

³ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 129.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs & Prophets*, p. 62.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 325.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 1, p. 26.

⁸ *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 364.

⁹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 56.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 193.

¹¹ As I have written elsewhere, I have a personal “bottom line:” Since the resurrected Jesus is the core of my faith, I believe in the Gospel record of what Jesus taught concerning Creation and the Flood. No matter how young or old life on earth turns out to be, I believe I will meet that first “male and female” and their sons Abel and Seth. I believe we will share the joy of the Sabbath “made for man.” I look forward to meeting Noah. I anticipate that my knowledge of them will turn out to be very partial, very incomplete.



General Conference: Living in Hope

By Alden Thompson

God's people rarely have their act together for more than a few minutes at a time. That's encouraging, actually. Dip your finger anywhere into Scripture or into Adventist history, and you'll find that the saints are powerfully inclined to quarrel with each other.

Yet even though the church always falls short of God's ideal, here and there he has sprinkled brief moments of glory and joy, times when hope burns bright and God's presence seems so very near. With a General Conference Session on the horizon in just a few short weeks, one vivid example from the Old Testament, one from the New, and one from Adventist history, can help us live in hope.

Hezekiah's Passover

As the story is told in 2 Chronicles 29-31¹, Scripture doesn't say when or how King Hezekiah decided to tackle the cobwebs hanging over the broken doors to the house of God. But by God's grace, he opened his heart to the work of the Spirit and good things began to happen. The Levites moved in, repaired the doors, carted away the filth, and the people came to worship. They "rejoiced," reports the Chronicler, "for the thing had come about suddenly" (2 Chron. 29:36).

But God wasn't through. "Let's have a Passover," declared the king, vowing to renew a sacred tradition that had fallen by the way (see 2 Chronicles 30).

The word went out. "God is gracious and merciful," said the king, "and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him" (verse 9).

It worked; the people returned,

streaming toward Jerusalem, eager to meet their God once again.

This Passover was especially astonishing because the start date had already passed.

Wait until next year? No way, said the king. We're moving ahead. And they did, even though many of the people had to eat the Passover meal "not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness" (verse 19).

Did God turn away because of the broken rules? No. The king pled with God to "pardon all who set their hearts to seek God, the Lord the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness" (verses 18-19).

"The Lord heard Hezekiah," declares Scripture, "and healed the people" (verse 20).

Let's do it some more, exclaimed the king. And they did, keeping the festival for another full week. According to the Chronicler, nothing like that had happened in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon (verse 26).

Disciples in Jerusalem

The first eight chapters of the book of Acts records a wild roller coaster of events. Before his ascension, Jesus promised that the Spirit would come with power. It did, triggering wonderful fellowship and powerful evangelism. Some 3,000 believers joined in one day, converts heard the gospel in their own language, and they shared their goods in common.

But if Hezekiah's Passover started in near despair and ended in euphoria, the Pentecost event in Acts went the other direction. Only a few short days separate

the glory of Acts 1-4 from the sobering events of Acts 5-8: Ananias and Sapphira were struck down for their lies, the saints began to grumble about unequal food shares; Steven was arrested, then stoned; and Saul began to persecute believers.

Did the church wither and die? No. God still had good plans for his people.

Adventist History: 1901

In the early 1890s, the brethren had shipped Ellen White out to Australia to get her out of their hair.² When she returned nearly a decade later, the church was in such turmoil she didn't want to attend the General Conference of 1901, later admitting to the delegates: "I did not want to come to Battle Creek. I was afraid the burdens I would have to bear would cost my life ..."³

But she came and stepped to the podium as soon as President Irwin opened the floor for business.

"I feel a special interest in the movements and decisions that shall be made at this Conference regarding things that should have been done years ago, and especially ten years ago, when we were assembled in Conference, and the Spirit and power of God came into our meeting, testifying that God was ready to work for this people if they would come into working order. The brethren assented to the light God had given, but there were those connected with our institutions, especially with the Review and Herald Office and the Conference, who brought in elements of unbelief, so that the light that was given was not acted upon. It was assented to, but no special change was made to bring about such a condition of

things that the power of God could be revealed among his people.”⁴

As Ellen White unburdened her heart, she expressed sentiments that had never before been uttered before a General Conference, nor have they been repeated since:

“At the last Conference which I attended here, there was gossiping and controversy in every house. If the people had prayed instead of gossiping, if they

had talked with God, the condition of things would have been very different. ...

**We know
what we
have
to do.**

“All who are educated in the office of publication should see there exemplified the principles of heaven. I would rather lay a child of mine in his grave than have him go there to see

these principles mangled and perverted. ... You have no right to manage, unless you manage in God’s order. ...

“O, my very soul is drawn out in these things! Men who have not learned to submit themselves to the control and discipline of God, are not competent to train the youth, to deal with human minds. It is just as much an impossibility for them to do this work as it would be for them to make a world. That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be, -- that is past. What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle. ...

“Let every one of you go home, not to chat, chat, chat, but to pray. Go home and pray. Talk with God. Go home and plead with God to mold and fashion you after the divine similitude. ...”⁵

When Ellen White sat down, the General Conference president returned to the podium and simply said: “These are certainly very plain words ...”⁶ Indeed.

A season of prayer followed, and the meeting was transformed. Significant changes were implemented. But the most dramatic change at the conference was the change in spirit. An editorial published toward the end of the session in the *General Conference Bulletin* sums up the feelings of the delegates before, during, and at the end of the conference:

“To sketch the inner history of the Conference just closed, would require the skilled pen of heavenly inspiration. Even that which has been apparent to beholders, has challenged their admiration to the verge of incredulity. From rumors that thickly flew across the horizon of every part of the field, a few weeks ago, hardly a delegate appeared at this session who did not anticipate worry, and even disaster more or less serious. Various theories were afloat, which most, if not all, had previously canvassed, and decided their merits or demerits. Whispers of disintegration were borne from ear to ear, and speculations as to the final result were rife.

“Take it altogether, this has been one of the most peculiar, yet the very best General Conference ever convened by Seventh-day Adventists. There has been no particular outward demonstration of joy, but a quiet, deep-seated calm has

apparently attended everyone, producing an expression of the sweetest peace. All differences of sentiment which had been the cause of more or less alienation, were buried under the gentle droppings of the Holy Spirit, accompanying the words of instruction from the servants of the Lord. From the first of the business meetings, not one unkind word was spoken on the floor, not a single rebutting argument was used. But all seemed to vie with one another in maintaining the rules of courtesy and Christian deportment.”⁷

Ellen White’s reaction?

“During the General Conference, the Lord wrought mightily for His people. Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately steppings of the Lord our Redeemer. We praise his holy name; for He has brought deliverance to His people.”⁸

Can the spirit of 1901 live again? If we go home, not to “chat, chat, chat, but to pray,” it could happen again, maybe even “suddenly,” as in the days of Hezekiah. Prayer is no substitute for hard work, but it prepares us to do our work.

We don’t have a prophetic messenger to call us to account. But we know what we have to do.

¹ Biblical quotations in the article are cited from the New Revised Standard Version.

² Ellen White letter to O.A. Olsen, Dec. 1, 1896, *EGW 1888 Materials*, pp. 1621-1627.

³ *General Conference Bulletin*, 12 April 1901, p. 204.

⁴ Ellen White as cited in *General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. IV, Extra #1, 3 April 1901, p. 23.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 27.

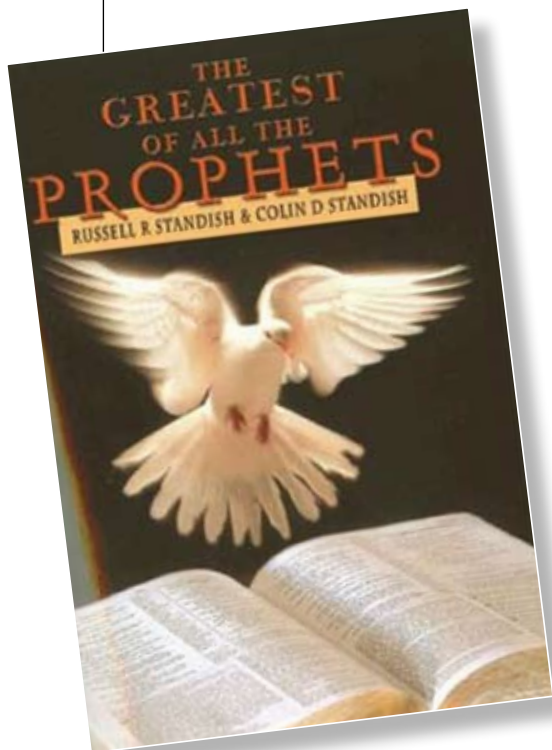
⁷ *General Conference Bulletin*, 25 April 1901, p. 457.

⁸ *Review and Herald*, 26 November 1901, p. 761.

Blast From the Past

Book Review by James Coffin

Russell R., and Colin D. Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets*, (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 2004), 411 pages.



When I read the book *The Greatest of All the Prophets*, by Russell R. and Colin D. Standish, it was like stepping back in time. I'm personally acquainted with almost every living person who played a role in the events described, and I spent several years in the geographical vortex of much of what transpired.

The Greatest of All the Prophets is a defense of Ellen G. White's inerrant prophetic role and a denunciation of those who've sought to paint a more human and fallible picture of her prophetic ministry. The writers address what they label a "five-pronged assault"

on "God's precious truth" (p. 12), most of which took place in the South Pacific Division.

A Jolting Title

The idea of Ellen White being the greatest of all the prophets was first proposed to Russell Standish (now deceased) in 1979 by Dunbar Smith, then medical director of the Far Eastern Division. "I wonder if when we finally reach heaven we shall discover that Sister White was the greatest of all the prophets," Smith mused.

Initially, Standish recoiled at the suggestion. Yet he was gripped by Smith's reasoning: If the prophetic herald of the first advent was "a prophet of the first magnitude" (p. 4), the prophetic herald of the second advent would be an even greater prophet. The book's title alone raises at least three major concerns for me:

1. Ellen White typically understated rather than overstated her role. She described her ministry as the "lesser light" to lead to the "greater light." How could the prophet providing the "lesser light" be greater than the prophets providing the "greater light"?

2. Ellen White had a lot to say about speculation. And Standish acknowledges his initial qualms about Smith's speculation. Yet 25 years later, that speculation became the title of the book he co-authored with his twin brother, Colin. The title isn't a tentative question; it's a declaration. I believe Ellen White would be appalled.

3. In a world in which Adventism's status as a truly Christian denomination is still called into question—in part because of our dependence upon extra-biblical writings—and in a world where (particularly in the past) many Adventists have made the Bible secondary to the writings of Ellen White, such a flamboyant title can do much harm.

A Disturbingly Critical Tone

I don't for a minute question the commitment to the Adventist Church of either Russell or Colin Standish. Having seen what they feel are disturbing changes, they've felt compelled to "cry aloud and spare not." But in their zeal, they move into areas that "only God can judge," to use Russell's own words. They repeatedly go *beyond* documentable facts.

A case in point: The 1919 Bible Conference transcripts reveal that many of the questions asked in the 1970s had been asked more than 50 years earlier by church leaders who worked closely with Ellen White. The Standishes state: "It showed little courage on the part of General Conference leaders to wait four years after Sister White's death before launching into a decided denigration of her prophetic gift ..." (p. 4).

Is it not possible, however, that the matter would have arisen sooner had a major Bible conference been held, bringing so many leaders together? Was it inherently sinister that it happened to take place after she was already dead?

The Standishes call the 1919 Bible Conference "a disgraceful denial of faith" (p. 4). I view it as a challenging attempt to define our faith. The Standishes declare that "the 1919 Bible Conference was a disgrace to our church" (p. 162). I suggest it was a high point, at which we sought to openly and honestly address a complicated matter.

As I read the transcripts, I see a group of church leaders who are deeply committed to God, to the church, and to Ellen White's prophetic role. However, they're deeply troubled by the manner in which she's both perceived and used. From my perspective, they're sincerely wrestling with a major theological and practical issue in much the same way that our

denomination's founders wrestled with doctrinal issues following the Great Disappointment.

The Standishes not only disagree with many of the observations and conclusions of conference participants, but also impute evil intent to some. Note but one of several examples, this one related to J.N. Anderson's "ruse of raising the almost irrelevant issue of verbal inspiration ..." (p. 174). On what basis do they imply that Anderson had sinister motives and was deliberately raising a non-issue? How do they know that he hadn't repeatedly encountered belief in verbal inspiration in his ministry?

General Conference President A.G. Daniells (1901-1922) comes in for major dishonorable mention. The Standishes note, among other things, that his dietary habits didn't comport with Ellen White's advocacy of vegetarianism. They cite testimony suggesting it was Daniells's meat eating that kept him from being re-elected as GC president in 1922. However, they go beyond facts and documented testimony in their attempts to discredit him: "It is also reported that when Elder Daniells lay dying of cancer, he refused an anointing service. He stated that his illness had been caused, he believed, by his indulgence in a flesh diet, and that it would be inappropriate for him to be anointed. He is reported to have said to a young man who stated that he was praying for Elder Daniells' recovery, 'Don't pray for my recovery. I brought this condition on myself. Please pray for my salvation'" (p. 169).

The writers give no clue concerning where one could look to prove or disprove the allegation. Their willingness to use unsubstantiated rumor to discredit a dead man seems glaringly at odds with the quote from Ellen White that they seemingly take as the marching

orders for their book (p. 5): "[U]pon every point the accusers should be called upon to bring their proof. Every charge should be carefully investigated; it should not be left in any uncertain way, the people should not be left to think that it may be or it may not be. The accusers should do all in their power to lift every sign of reproach that cannot be substantiated. ... The people must not be left to believe a lie ..."¹

While the Standishes condemn the South Pacific Division for allegedly undermining Ellen White, Avondale College receives the most extreme condemnation. In a 2003 article in the *Remnant Herald*, quoted in *The Greatest of All the Prophets* (p. 358), Russell Standish states: "I can think of no tertiary institution in the South Pacific which is less fitted to train young people for God's service than Avondale College. It has rejected the S.D.A. faith and does its utmost to destroy that faith." He then goes on to enumerate a long list of traditional Adventist teachings that one will not hear at Avondale. The book next states: "In presenting this list, Russell was abstemious."

One wonders what tertiary institutions in the South Pacific Standish is referring to. Is he talking about all tertiary institutions (i.e. state universities), and Avondale is even less fitted than they are to train young people for God's service? Or is he saying that Avondale is worse than the colleges in the South Pacific's mission field? Or is he just indulging in hyperbole?

A Few Words of Sympathy

While I find the overall spirit of *The Greatest of All the Prophets* objectionable, I sympathize with the authors on several points.

1. The theology the Standishes espouse is the theology with which I grew up. The triumphalism, legalism, perfectionism,

judgmentalism, exclusivism, and isolationism—that's my perception, at least—were all part of my spiritual instruction. The book *Questions on Doctrine* was anathematized in my home church. We believed that death with any sin unforgiven guaranteed damnation. We expected God's true followers to achieve perfection before the coming of Jesus. We believed that God might at any time come to our name in the investigative judgment, and if we had even one unforgiven sin, we'd be lost. We believed in the sinful (post-fall) nature of Christ. We believed that Ellen White's inspiration was, in effect, inerrant. If she said it, whatever the subject, it was fact.

2. Many of the foregoing teachings have of recent years been dropped, modified, or downplayed. For those who see Adventism as a spiritual movement, such changes may be welcome. But for those who view the church as the repository of an unchanging corpus of belief, such changes are frightening indeed. And when long-serving, effective, committed church workers who've sacrificed greatly for the cause are banned from Adventist pulpits because they've expressed concerns about the very real changes they've seen, I understand their consternation—even though I may personally welcome some of the changes. I believe that the "old guard" in the South Pacific and elsewhere has been treated with too heavy a hand.

3. There has been too much attempted revisionism concerning some of the church's historic teachings—the nature of Christ, for example. Instead of candidly saying that we at one time quite consistently taught that Christ took Adam's sinful (post-fall) nature, many have incorrectly argued that only a "lunatic fringe" ever taught such. The compilers of *Questions on Doctrine*

created an appendix of Ellen White quotes concerning the nature of Christ in which they italicize what they perceived as the pertinent points—because without the italics, it's highly unlikely the reader would arrive at the “appropriate” conclusion.

Years ago I checked the original of every quote contained in Appendix B of *Questions on Doctrine*. Because Ellen White's material was used, then reworked and used again, often

hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying on God for power.”

And if the next two sentences had been included, they would have even more called into question the heading's appropriateness and the inference created by the misleading italics. Ellen White's original comment added: “This is the privilege of all. In proportion to our faith will be our victory.” (If space permitted, I could cite other examples of equally sloppy scholarship in Appendix B.)

I talked about grace, certainly. But I understood neither the magnitude of sin nor the magnitude of grace. I felt I was close to the desired perfection—but “almost” leaves you just as devoid of hope as never having tried.

When I discovered grace, I desperately wanted to accept it, but I resisted because of fear. Yet I knew I wasn't attaining perfection. The defining moment of my spiritual experience came when I realized I'd rather face eternal annihilation than to

Perhaps surprisingly, I'd recommend that people who are interested in either Adventist theology or Adventist history read it—despite its excesses.

repeatedly, a statement may appear in a variety of iterations with a variety of additions and deletions. Had the compilers noted that several iterations exist and that they don't always say the same thing, it would have been helpful. But the quotes seem to have been grabbed willy-nilly, and there was no logic as to which parts of passages were included, which parts were omitted, and which iterations were used.

Note this statement from Appendix B, under the heading “Took Sinless Human Nature”: “He [Christ] *vanquished Satan in the same nature over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory*”²

Despite the heading, the statement isn't addressing post-fall (sinful) versus pre-fall (sinless) nature. It addresses humanity versus divinity. Note the next couple of non-italicized sentences: “The enemy was overcome by Christ in His human nature. The power of the Saviour's Godhead was

So What About the Book?

Perhaps surprisingly, I'd recommend that people who are interested in either Adventist theology or Adventist history read it—despite its excesses. Those who already subscribe to such beliefs will find a ringing affirmation. And if the Standishes are correct, buying in to their theology is a matter of eternal life and death. My guess is that a lot of younger Adventists, even pastors, have never encountered the theology defended by the Standishes. If for no other reason, they should examine it because it *is* part of our denomination's history. But that doesn't automatically make it correct.

Many years ago, I subscribed to much of the theology presented in *The Greatest of All the Prophets*. My life was one of constant fear and uncertainty. It was as if I were perpetually glancing over my shoulder to see if God was looking.

live forever with a God who was as hard to please as the one I perceived.

Perfection is a worthy goal, certainly. But when perfection becomes the prerequisite, the gospel of Christ is nullified. Grace should evoke a deep concern about behavior. But salvation should never be equated with a level of behavioral achievement. It always has been and always will be a gift. The revelation of that fact is the greatest of all the gifts of the prophets.

James Coffin is senior pastor of the Markham Woods Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Longwood, Florida.

¹Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 3, pp. 348-349.

²Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, April 25, 1901, italics present in *Questions on Doctrine*.

7 QUESTIONS for...Herb Douglass By Marcel Schwantes

Herb Edgar Douglass, Jr., Th.D., is a respected Adventist author, theologian, educator, and administrator. After pastoring in Illinois (1947-1953), he taught religion at Pacific Union College (1953-1960) and at Atlantic Union College, where he also served as head of the theology department, academic dean, and college president (1960-1970). He was on the staff that edited *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1955-1957) and worked as associate editor of *Review and Herald* magazine (1970-1976) and as vice president of Pacific Press Publishing



Association (1978-1985). Dr. Douglass received his doctoral degree at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California (1964), and has authored 24 books. In 2008, he was given the Living Legend recognition at Atlantic Union College. Dr. Douglass is president emeritus of Weimar Institute (1985-1992) and also contributes regular monthly blogs for the *Adventist Today* website.

Have there been any significant movements or changes in your own theological views in the decades since you first entered the ministry?

Maturation, year by year, should deepen one's core worldview. After becoming an Adventist, my thirst for learning more has never been quenched. Slowly I began to see the essence of the Great Controversy theme. Coupled with the clarity that came in my doctoral studies, I saw that this theme was the only paradigm that could handle life's biggest issues. Pursuing a systematic, coherent, integrated understanding of this core biblical theme has become my holy grail.

What do you think of the theological diversity in the Adventist Church today?

I lament it but expect it! Our Lord's Laodicean prediction is all around us. Diversity, in itself, is not a goal that we should strive for. But I would rather have diversity than a hard-fisted, autonomous, religious environment. In my opinion, when we stray away from the centrality of the life and words of Jesus, we surely will have diversity.

Let's get your perspective on the current state of Adventism. Is the situation in the Adventist Church better or worse today than, say, 100 years ago?

I can survey only 62 years of church service—and wow, what changes I have not only seen, but also been a part of! I saw remarkable changes in the ministry when social security was made available to the pastors, bringing in advantages to home ownership, etc. More important was the 1957 theological hurricane that spun the book *Questions on Doctrine* into print, changing theological directions for more than one generation of seminary students. It introduced some unfortunate theological divisions in our teaching and pastoral ministries—and the damage continues.

From another direction, in the '40s and '50s missionary appointments and expansions were high on the horizon for college graduates. Public evangelism was very productive. Of course, circumstances changed with new forms of communication, transportation, etc. But one looks back on the years that ended with the '50s as springtime for most Adventists. Yet, summer and harvest does come: the religious world has also moved on rapidly, bringing to the Adventist Church today new challenges that must be carefully met, such as the appeal of "seeker-friendly" churches and the allure of "spiritual formation" grounded in experience rather than in biblical commitment.

The political divide between left and right in America seems to have become a gulf so wide, so polarizing, that American politicians are increasingly signaling that they may leave politics altogether. To what extent is partisan religious behavior at various levels of the Adventist Church driving away those who might otherwise serve well in leadership?

Thoughtful question! In my opinion, those who make that decision are good people who have not found for themselves a clear message based on rock-bottom principles. Without that base, they are worn out from trying to get their thinking or policies by listening/reading to the thinking of others. That goes for denominational leadership as well as political leadership! Thinking people are not troubled by the right or the left, especially for Adventist leadership. When one's theological picture is a product of someone else's thinking, even though that other person may be spot on, that leader is never at peace, always tugged this way and that when listening to or reading what most anybody else is saying. Sad!

The election of the first identifiably black president in the United States brings with it the question: "Is not the election of Barack Obama a clear signal that Adventism should begin serious discussion of a plan to racially integrate all conference administrative teams?"

Frankly, I see no connection with a popularly elected black president and the election of church officials. Anyone who knows the history of separated conferences knows that all of that was done by democratically chosen leadership. Everyone got what they thought was best. And so it will be in the future.

You have spent much of your professional career in the educational system, where you interacted with young people. How do you explain that at present more than 50 percent of those who were raised in the Adventist Church leave?

If Adventist children are not fed clear-cut, full-bore gospel principles (which is more than knowing which day is the Sabbath and where the dead are), we can expect all kinds of troubles ahead, no matter how many A's they got in Bible classes.

What are three things that you would like to see changed in the Adventist Church?

1. Clearly answer the question, "How far out of Babylon have we come?" What doctrines do we most often emphasize that are historically based on doctrines of other churches—and further back, in some cases, to Greek philosophy? Doing so is not "sola scriptura."

2. Honestly and faithfully revisit the actual historical happenings in the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference and the 1957 publication of *Questions on Doctrine*. All I ask for is an examination of the events—free from presuppositions that color so much written about these events through the years.

3. For the first time, really take a look at what Ellen White has written or said about: (a) God's plan of salvation and what God hopes to accomplish thereby; (b) last-day events issues and why our Lord's return has been sadly delayed; and (c) how getting God's character right is the key to getting a lot of our theological issues resolved.

Adventist Man



Resumé No-Nos Church Eternal Last Generation Hype

Dear Adventist Man, I am a graduating theology major interested in pastoral ministry. What kinds of questions do conferences ask when searching for a pastoral intern?

Ah, my young friend, let me congratulate you on entering a job market in which nobody is hiring—at least that's what they will tell you unless you know the administrators personally or have made a name for yourself in another conference. Nevertheless, I shall give you guidance. While you may be tempted to think that questions about your conversion experience, skill set, and vision for ministry are the most important—THINK AGAIN! Conferences, particularly ones north of Indiana and south of Canada, get to the heart of the real issues of ministry.

- Do you eat meat?
 - Do you wear a wedding ring?
- (The rest are optional, since you are unlikely*

to get this far if you answered "yes" to any of the preceding questions.)

- Do you enjoy music not found within the sacred pages of the hymnal?

- Can you merrily disregard General Conference policy to serve a dictatorship?

If you can answer yes to all of the above, you are well on your way.

Do Adventists believe in "once saved, always saved"?

No, but we do believe in "once a church, always a church." This is where a group of people work hard to meet the attendance/financial requirements to become a church, then subsequently dwindle to a handful of people sponsored by one cantankerous tithe payer in order to sap the energies of an overworked pastor.

Are Last Generation Theology proponents living up to the light they have?

According to the primary developer of this theology, M.L. Andraesen: "It is necessary for God to produce at least *one* man who has kept the law. In the absence of such a man, God

loses and Satan wins."¹ Since Jesus has not yet come, and since Jesus doesn't count in the above statement, we see that Last Generation Theology (LGT) proponents do not, in fact, live up to the light they have—but that is no matter. It is far more fun to lob polemics at non-LGT adherents than to demonstrate its truthfulness by personal example.

Adventist Man, is it true that Haiti made a pact with the devil, causing that terrible earthquake like Pat Robertson says?

I think a better question is how does Pat Robertson know of such a national pact? In the absence of documentation, I am led to believe that it is Pat Robertson who made a pact with the devil—or at least was present during whatever dark ritual would be used to make such a pact.

¹*The Sanctuary Service* (Maryland: Review and Herald), 1947, p. 316.

Editorial from page 3

different from a secular hospital's approach. It means that every staff member who is part of that institution needs to be a dedicated Christian who understands and agrees with the primary focus of that institution.

The very atmosphere will speak not of humanistic loving and caring, but of truly divine compassion. There will be evident a loving concern that shows that people are serving not to simply earn a living, but to witness to the goodness and faithfulness of God and his son, Jesus Christ: El.

If a church operates a food factory, it has the same mission to introduce people to Christ. Through its products it will reach people who cannot be reached in any other way. It can sponsor nutrition classes or place coupons for health courses on its cans and in its packages.

Similar ideas could be given for other church institutions.

Gospel of Grace

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote this about the work of Christ: "The Saviour made each work of healing an occasion for implanting divine principles in the mind and soul. This was the purpose of His work. He imparted earthly blessings that He might incline the hearts of men to receive the gospel of His grace."¹ We will help people whether they respond or not; genuine love is unconditional. But along with God, our goal is that none should perish but that all should come to repentance (see 2 Peter 3:9).

When was the last time you, as chairman or board member, raised the question: "How well are we doing at our primary mission?" The success of the

institution will be measured not by a worldly standard, but by God's standard: what contribution has it made to preparing people for eternity?

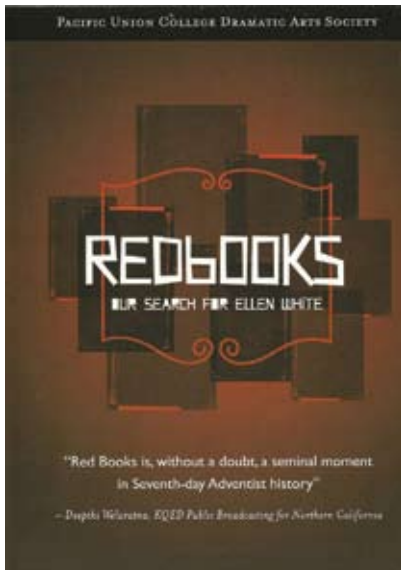
The church cannot afford to be diverted from its primary mission. No one deliberately changes the direction of an institution. It is a gradual process. That is why having a clear concept of mission is so important. That mission is its uniqueness. If the church institution's primary mission is no different from the secular institution's, then its basic policies and strategies will be no different. It is even possible for a secular institution that has high moral values to provide better service and better products than a church institution.

Church institutions are not necessarily Christian—but they should be!

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 20.

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- That she was an instrument used by God in the arena of her talents?
- All of the above?
- None of the above?

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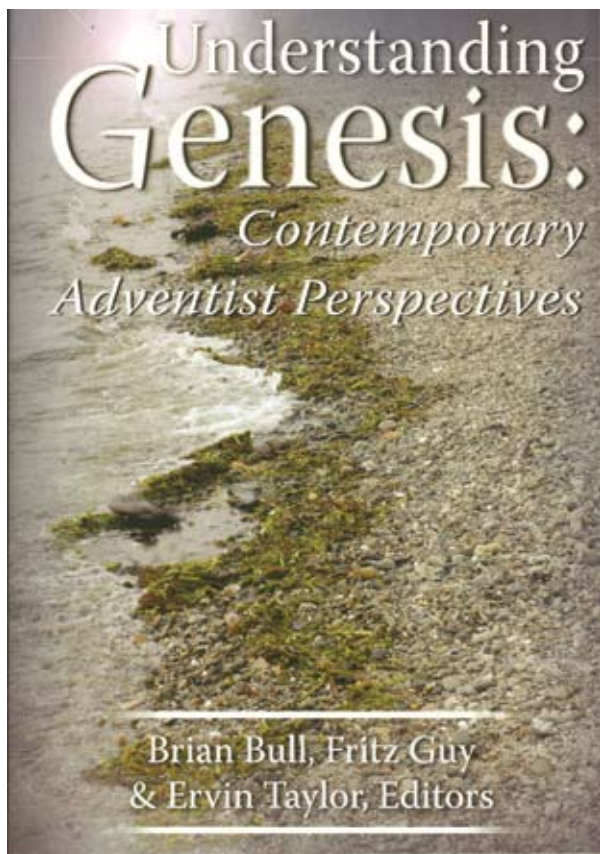
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