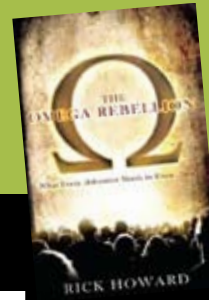


Homosexuality in the
First Three Centuries

Conditional Prophecy
and Last-Day Events



Is Spiritual
Formation
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we
KNOW

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Is There a Mystery About the Sabbath We Haven't Yet Discovered?

J. David Newman

I have been ruminating lately as to why no prominent non-Adventist pastors or theologians have accepted the seventh day as the Sabbath. Pastors such as Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Leith Anderson, Rob Bell, Andy Stanley, Charles Stanley, Joel Osteen, Ed Young, Adam Hamilton, Max Lucado—and I could go on—have shown no conviction on this subject. Famous writers such as C.S. Lewis and Philip Yancey have not embraced the seventh-day Sabbath. World-renowned evangelists such as Billy Graham and Luis Palau and thousands of theologians such as Walter Brueggemann, Rowan Williams, Emil Brunner, Thomas C. Oden, Wolfhart Pannenberg, N.T. Wright, and Karl Barth have remained committed to their understanding of the Lord's day.

As Adventists, we have preached that the final conflict will be over worship. Will we receive the seal of God (the seventh-day Sabbath) or the mark of the beast (Sunday)? But Sabbath keepers remain a tiny minority. Why?

Jesus told his disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit in full glory and power and what his primary role would be. "And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. ... When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:8, 13).

Where Is Holy Spirit Conviction?

Why has the Holy Spirit not convicted even one of the above-named individuals to worship on the seventh day and not on the first day? Is it possible that keeping the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath is important in a way that we have not yet discovered?

The Sabbath has been a great blessing to me and to my family. When we celebrate it in the right way, we receive a blessing that we cannot receive on any other day. It is the birthday of our world and the most striking symbol of our salvation. As we rest from our work on that day, we are reminded that we too rest from any work that we think might contribute to our salvation. It is a wonderful reminder of salvation by faith in the grace of God.

God inaugurated the Sabbath at Creation, and it is valid until Jesus returns to take us home with him. But is it possible that our particular interpretation of the role of the Sabbath in final events was meant for the 19th century and was in some areas conditional? At that time we had little or nothing to say about the Muslims. Now there are almost as many Muslims in the world as there are Christians. What would Sunday legislation mean to them now? Given the situation in our world today, is a *meaningful* Sunday law possible—one that could point to the requirements stated in the Book of Revelation of a mark in the hand (practice) and in the forehead (thought)? Is China on the verge of supporting such legislation? What about Hindus?

We do find conditional prophecies in the writings of Ellen White. In 1856 she wrote: "I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: 'Some food for worms,¹ some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.'²"

Conditional Prophecy

From our vantage point now, we know that everyone present at the Conference did become "food for worms." How do we determine which prophecies are conditional and which are unconditional? Could this apply to some of our interpretations of Daniel and Revelation? For example, at one time Turkey featured heavily in our end-time scenarios. Now we never mention this nation.

But back to my main point. Why, after Adventists have been preaching the Sabbath for some 160 years, have there been no converts from the ranks of large-church pastors and theologians? Have they all been rejecting the convicting power of the Holy Spirit?

Please, I would like to hear your answers to these perplexing questions. What do you think?

¹ Sister Clarissa M. Bonfoey, who fell asleep in Jesus only three days after this vision was given, was present in usual health, and was deeply impressed that she was one who would go into the grave, and stated her convictions to others.

² Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 131.

How do we determine which prophecies are conditional and which are unconditional?



The Lesser Light

Thank you for your recent article, “Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?” (Summer 2011). Your questions were pertinent and thoughtful. It is clear that to define her writings as “a continuing and authoritative source of truth” is to equate her writings to Scripture. Also, thank you for emphasizing that only God is infallible and that all prophets grow in their understanding of God and his Word. Whenever I am confronted with a perplexing statement, either in Scripture or in her writings, I have no problem suspending judgment.

R.W. FANSELAU
Ooltewah, Tennessee

Thank you so much for the article “Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?” In almost all counts you took the article right out of my brain—especially the part pertaining to our personal responsibility to “weigh carefully what is said” by prophets. Like you, for years I’ve maintained that the gift of prophecy did not die in 1915 and that the Spirit of Prophecy (that is, the Holy Spirit) continues to move in the lives of people today.

I wonder if we have wrongly taught a black and white perspective on the gift of prophecy that can’t be truly supported biblically? You used the standard Deuteronomy 18:22 as your support for how we view true and false prophets. But I would ask you to look closer at the actual text. Does what a prophet says have to be always true, let alone authoritative? Can a prophet be in good standing and still get it wrong? In this vein, I asked the White Estate (Robert Olson in particular) just such a question when they were going around to the colleges doing “damage control” back in the early ’80s at Pacific Union College. My question and statement went like this:

The prophet Nathan agreed with David that he should build the temple of God. Later God had to straighten Nathan out, who in turn had to qualify David’s involvement. Was Nathan a “false prophet” because he spoke out of turn? Didn’t the test of time and truth bear him out to be a true prophet even though he spoke in error?

Again, have we painted our prophets into a proverbial corner by demanding that everything they say be true? Don’t systematic passages that explain the gift of prophecy fully persuade us of our responsibility to test everything that is said rather than just take what the prophet said unquestioningly? Isn’t truth “truth” regardless of who says it? Does a person who has been accepted as a prophet garner infallibility? Ellen G. White taught otherwise, but do we truly take her at her advice regarding her errors? (I find it interesting that we throw around the word “infallible” but rarely

talk about her errors.) Your article rightly says that we haven’t had much integrity on this issue.

May I add a thought to the apostle vs. prophet authority issue that you brought up toward the end of the article. When we read passages like 1 Corinthians 15, doesn’t the very designation of apostle give what that apostle says more authority than what a prophet says? When John says, “we have seen with our eyes...and our hands have touched” Jesus, isn’t he telling us that they were eyewitnesses to the Son of God’s incarnation and that this gives them authority no one else has? If we took this position, wouldn’t we be more apt to measure the lesser light by the Light of the World?

Lastly, when Ellen G. White wrote about being the lesser light, wasn’t she comparing herself to the moon? The moon has no light of its own. It is waxing or waning every day. Once a month it can’t even be seen. Only once a month is it full. And when it is full, it is still full of holes. How like every man and woman who reflects HIS love.

JON SPEYER
La Selva Beach, California

Congratulations on pointing out the 180-to-360 degree change of some of her statements. As you state, “Adventists have spent millions of dollars in research to try to prove the infallibility of Ellen White, and still we have not satisfied the critics” (p. 14). I suggest that critics base their judgments on what she said, not what others think she said.

In 1844 didn’t she have a vision about the “midnight cry”? In 1847 in *Early Writings*, p. 27, she wrote about

that vision. Midnight cry—wrong; shut door—wrong; open door—wrong; breast plate of Jesus—wrong; investigative judgment—wrong. At that time one was lost or saved; you really didn't know when your name would come up for judgment. ...

Back in the 1940s, what troubled me as a teenager was Turkey, the World War II Dardanelles, the end of time, and that four-headed leopard who could bite you in four different places all at once. I guess the most troubling thing about the Seventh-day Adventist prophet is the amalgamation of man and beast theory “seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals and in certain races of men.”

DON HALSEL
Keene, Texas

Excellent article! You have made a significant contribution to the church with your thoughtful treatment of this subject. So much of our trauma, even over issues like the Investigative Judgment and 1844, would melt away if we practiced what we preached about the Bible and Ellen White's relationship to it. I applaud you for being willing to tackle this one and pray that your article will receive wide distribution.

JERE WEBB
Eagle, Idaho

Kudos to editor Newman for his challenging editorial titled “Slanting the Truth” and his incisive article on EGW, “Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?” in the Summer 2011 issue of *Adventist Today*. Both essays are worthy of careful reflection. They typify what we have come to expect from Newman, who (1) takes seriously God's Word, while at the same time (2) strives honestly to apply

the principles to our situation in the 21st century.

RICHARD COFFEN
Gretna, Nebraska

Seven Questions

Editor's Note: When we asked General Conference President Ted Wilson to answer seven questions for Adventist Today, he declined. We printed the questions without his answers (Spring 2011). Consequently, we have received the answers as one of our readers sees it. She is Lucille J. Roos, who writes from Dexter, Oregon.

Ted Wilson should not be offended by my answers for him. I am 88 years old, and my mother, Levona Crutchlow, went to school in Healdsburg, California, with his grandfather, “Nat” Wilson, along with Alonzo Baker (Lonnie).

1. Our readers would like to know the human side of their world leader. What would you like to share about yourself in 200 words?

I am not divine.

2. You are making revival and reformation a hallmark of your administration. Why is this so important?

Revival and reformation are end results. Go to #5.

3. The 1976 Annual Council called for a similar revival and reformation. How does this call build on the previous call?

Let's have no more “retreats” but more “advances.” Go to #5.

4. Since the 1976 call did not bring its desired results, what lessons can we learn that will make a difference in this call?

Go to #5.

5. Are there limits to theological diversity in the Adventist Church? If the answer is Yes, how do we determine those limits?

There should be theological diversity allowed or else we are not studying or thinking; however, there are only three non-negotiables. Not 28, only three.

- God is our Creator, Redeemer, and loving, merciful Friend and Father who will save *all* who trust him.

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to supply evidence of his Father's love and care.

- How we treat each other and those who do not agree with us indicates how well we interpret and understand #1 and #2.

6. Apart from the need for revival and reformation, what other major challenges does the Adventist Church face?

From the General Conference on down, the conferences are top heavy. They have lost touch with reality and the faithful ones out in the boondocks.

Who are the ones doing the revival and reformation? They are the ones in ASI, Patch, 3ABN, LLBN, Pine Knoll with Jonathan Gallagher, and Tropical Health Alliance. Do they lack money? NO. Are they making a difference? They surely are!

7. How do you build consensus among the wide diversity of leaders at the General Conference, Division, Union, and Conference levels?

Limit the number of positions and let each cultural division create their own set of guidelines as to woman preachers or elders.

HOW DO WE KNOW

BY JOHN MCLARTY

WHAT IS OUR AUTHORITY WHEN IT COMES to matters of theology, faith, spiritual life, and religious law? The classic Adventist answer is the Bible. Ellen White's writings, the ante-Nicene fathers, science, and grandma's stories may be interesting, but they are not ultimately authoritative. Our only real authority is the Bible and the Bible only.

That's what we claim. But is it true? No. Not in practice. Our behavior demonstrates the powerful influence of several authorities. We "know" something in the theological arena from the interplay of the Bible, the church, and human experience. The Bible alone is not sufficient.

The Bible is sufficiently complex that godly, smart people will come to different



conclusions about what it means. The nature of Christ, human nature, the fate of the wicked, Sabbath keeping, soteriology—these are the most religious of subjects. But 2,000 years of Bible study has not brought Christians together. Various churches have decided what the Bible means when it addresses these issues. Members, and especially clergy, of these communities are not free to promulgate their convictions on these topics based on their personal reading of the Bible. Their reading of the Bible is constrained by the authority of the church.

In Adventism, this community restraint is illustrated by our doctrines on the Trinity and eating pork. There is a nearly universal consensus among Christians regarding the plain meaning of Scripture on these two points. Regarding the Trinity, Adventists agree with this consensus. On the matter of eating pork, Adventists disagree with the vast majority of Christian scholars about what the Bible teaches. In each case, of course, we believe our teaching is the plain meaning of the Bible. We regard those who interpret the Bible differently as so benighted or perverse that they must be expelled from preaching and teaching positions in the church.

It does not matter how many texts or how much ancient or contemporary scholarship a theologian adduces to support his views. If he teaches non-Trinitarian views of God or advocates eating pork, the Adventist Church will insist he is not reading the Bible correctly. It is impossible for a scholar using any imaginable method of Bible research to change the mind of the church regarding any of our 28 doctrines. On these points we “already know” what the Bible means. So, in practice, the Bible itself is no longer the sole authority or even the supreme authority when it comes to matters addressed in those doctrines.

A further illustration of the authority of the church: there are Adventist doctrines we can find in the Bible *only if* we are instructed by the church. Out of the billions of people on the planet today, not one single, solitary individual will ever find 1844 in the Bible unless that person is taught by Adventists. In the last 100 years, no Old Testament scholars have seen 1844 in the Bible unless they were influenced by Adventist scholarship. It’s not that 1844 is not in the Bible, but the Bible by itself is hopelessly insufficient to teach people this doctrine. They must be taught by the church. No one today attempting the putative William Miller approach to Bible interpretation—reading without reference to commentaries, attempting to use the Bible as its own interpreter—would ever come up with the full suite of Adventist doctrines.

Human Experience

In addition to the Bible text and the interpretive authority of the Church, we are guided toward truth by human experience.

In the early 1900s, Adventists agreed with other Anabaptist groups in disapproving of women dying their hair or wearing makeup. Those items of female vanity were proscribed along with earrings and necklaces. There is no explicit prohibition on wearing jewelry in current Adventist doctrine, and we don’t think twice about hair coloring. What changed? There was no new discovery about the meaning of ancient Greek words. Human experience led to the change. Interaction with cultures outside of North America compelled us to rethink our interpretation of the Bible. That, and realizing that the principles undergirding the original proscriptions against jewelry (e.g., inordinate self-indulgence) spoke more loudly against major donors’ Mercedes than against \$5 earrings.

Similarly, it was human experience that drove the church in North America to reinterpret the New Testament passages clearly condemning divorce and remarriage. We didn’t throw our Bibles away. Neither did we find it appropriate to stick with the plain reading of the text (which is reinforced by early Christian literature). Our pastoral concern for real, live people compelled us to make room in the church, and even among our clergy, for people who violated the ideal clearly articulated by Jesus.

Using experience as a basis for church decision-making is affirmed in the Bible itself. In Acts 15, when Peter urges the church to not impose the Mosaic rules on new members of the church, he bases his argument strictly on the long experience of the people of God. In Peter’s argument, experience is given priority over the plain meaning of the Scriptures. Another example of the appeal to experience is the call to test prophets by the fulfillment of their prophecies. Note in this argument that the prophet possesses no authority on the basis of a claimed connection with God. Rather, prophetic authority is determined by the *experience* of the people. The experience of God’s people could not create the content of the prophet’s message. However, the experience of God’s people could correct or invalidate a message brought by a prophet.

Science

Science is a particular type of human experience, or perhaps we could say it is a method for aggregating human experience. Scientific knowledge is not the discovery or possession of an individual. It does not require us to trust the non-reproducible experience of any particular individual. It is communal knowledge.

The notion of science as an authority

is ubiquitous in Adventism. We believe that studying the real world yields real knowledge. Of course, we also believe the Bible gives us special knowledge that is not available through ordinary experience. Controversy arises when the “real knowledge” gathered from science apparently contradicts the “special

The coherence between natural law, moral law, and the character of God has long been a theme in Adventist theology. We believe moral and religious laws promulgated by God are descriptions of how human life works best. So we expect correct interpretation of the Bible to align with the best in human wisdom.

knowledge” gathered from Scripture.

Among Adventists, this controversy is concentrated in the area of geochronology: How old are the fossils? How old is the solar system? According to the plain reading of the Bible, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them over the course of six days, 6,000 years ago. According to science, the solar system formed about 4.6 billion years ago, the first fossils about a billion years later.

What to Do?

Exodus 20:11 (NIV) says, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.” The

language is crystal clear. During the week of Genesis 1, God made everything—bugs, beasts, birds, sky, sun, the Milky Way, the universe. Everything.

Curiously, during the three Faith and Science Conferences sponsored by the General Conference, every conservative theologian who addressed the issue contradicted the plain meaning of these words. They all insisted the words “the heavens and the earth” did not really mean “the heavens and the earth.” God did not create the sun and planets on the fourth day. God did not create the fundamental matter that comprises Earth during creation week. The universe and, more particularly, the bodies of our solar system, including Earth itself, are billions of years old. This departure from the plain meaning of the text was not challenged by either General Conference President Ted Wilson or Biblical Research Institute Director Ángel Manuel Rodríguez. There was every appearance of total unanimity.

Adventist scholars and most administrators re-adjust their understanding of the plain meaning of the words “created the heavens and the earth” to accommodate science. They set aside the plain meaning of Scripture regarding the age of the solar system and accept instead the testimony of experience (i.e., science).

Moving from the Old Testament to the New, Paul wrote that death entered the world through the sin of one man, Adam. In light of these words, Adventist theologians argue that any departure from six days/6,000 years will destroy our doctrine of salvation. However, these theologians do not, in fact, take Paul’s words here at face value. Influenced by the experience of feminism, they modernize his words about *a man’s sin* and talk about *human sin* as the originator of biological death. Of course, this is not what Paul says. Paul blames Eve for being first to sin, but he does not reckon her sin to be serious enough or

her status to be exalted enough for her wrongdoing to cause death. It was the male’s sin that caused death. Theological assertions about an absolute link between *human* sin and all biological death require reinterpretation of the plain meaning of Paul’s words.

So How Do We Know?

The past offers guidance for the future. Our current doctrines came into being through an interplay of Scripture, the church, and human experience. Going forward, we can be confident a statement is true when it aligns with the testimony of the Bible, the church, and experience. When any one of these sources of information contradicts our statements, the tired old cliché “needs more study” is probably the truth.

The coherence between natural law, moral law, and the character of God has long been a theme in Adventist theology. We believe moral and religious laws promulgated by God are descriptions of how human life works best. So we expect correct interpretation of the Bible to align with the best in human wisdom. Our experience of Sabbath-keeping affirms the wisdom of the commandment. Faithfulness in marriage, carefulness in diet, and abstinence from tobacco are positively correlated with “the good life.” Experience, the Bible text, and the authoritative interpretations of the church agree.

Unfortunately for the tranquility of the church, the expected convergence has not happened in geochronology. While the vast majority of Adventists believe the church doctrine of six days/6,000 years, the majority of Adventist scientists, at least in North America, see an unbridgeable contradiction between what we know from Scripture and what we know from nature. The steadily accumulating data in the geological sciences point overwhelmingly to ages for fossils that are congruent with the ages Adventist leaders accept for the solar system.

No amount of church pontificating will change the words of the Bible text. Those words have a way of coming back again and again to challenge authoritative interpreters. This is why we are Sabbath keepers. Fifteen hundred years of official church insistence on the sacredness of Sunday broke against the steely words of the Bible text. Official church statements are equally vulnerable to human experience. The apparently impregnable wall of church authority will eventually crumble when it contradicts human experience. Church dogma cannot forever silence the voices of science, history, or the accumulated folk wisdom of the people of God.

Continuing to insist that our doctrines and public theology are shaped by the Bible and Bible only implies that all of our present doctrine and public theology is as infallible as the Bible itself. Thus any change would be a denial of the authority of the Bible. This fixity of doctrine, however, is contradicted by the preamble of our statement of beliefs and the history of our theological development.

It's time to recognize the variety of authorities and influences that shape our doctrine. It's time for a serious exploration of the proper role of church authority in defining truth. How do we properly account for the different roles of formal church structures and the whole people of God? What is the proper role of pastors, scientists, and historians in correcting the work of theologians and exegetes? What should the church do when the Bible and experience contradict?

At the very least, we ought not to anathematize one another on the basis of "truth" that can be supported by appeals to less than all three sources of authority that have historically shaped Christian theology.

John McLarty, a former editor of Adventist Today, is pastor of North Hill Adventist Fellowship in Enumclaw, Washington.

Response From a Nitpicker

By Richard Coffen

Editor's note: This response from Richard Coffen, retired Vice President for Editorial at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, is what I was looking for when writing the article "Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?" (Summer 2011). He makes some excellent points, and I will revise my article further as a result of his cogent observations.

At the outset, I must emphasize that I find my understanding of Ellen G. White and her function quite in harmony with the overall thrust of Newman's article. His emphasis agrees with what I understand to be a consensus among Seventh-day Adventist biblical and systematic theologians. Those at the Ellen G. White Estate will have to speak for themselves, but I suspect that their informed insight(s) will also largely conform to the thrust of Newman's thought. Will the majority of Adventist administrators concur? That remains to be seen. I surely hope that they will.

However, I have some comments that may add to the discussion, for dialogue will surely occur now that Newman's article circulates in the public arena. It seems to me that by and large the following observations do not weaken, but rather strengthen his perspective.

To summarize my reaction to the article: I suspect Newman has gone "a bridge too far."

Overstatement

For instance, it seems to me that his overall argument would have been stronger had he not overstated the exactitude of Old Testament predictions. Newman writes: "If what the prophet said did not come true, then he was a false prophet. ... His message was either completely true or else it was false" (p. 15). And Newman uses as an example Micaiah's prediction to King Ahab.

Newman reports: "An Old Testament prophet would have been stoned to death if he had made ... mistakes. ... The Old Testament is full of prophecies in which the smallest details always came to pass exactly as foretold" (p. 17). Once again he provides examples, such as "dogs eating Jezebel" (p. 17).

According to the scriptural evidence, neither fulfilled predictions nor unfulfilled predictions either vouchsafe or destroy the bona fides of a prophet.

Fulfilled Predictions—"If a prophet arises among you ... and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet" (Deut. 13:1-3, NET).

Unfulfilled Predictions—Newman's exaggerated assertions set us up for disappointment when we discover that Old Testament prophets didn't necessarily bat a thousand when it came to predictions.

On one level, this becomes clear when we understand the traditional Adventist view of conditional prophecy, even though some of these conditional predictions were not written with an if-then formula.

On another level, we can point to various unfulfilled predictions proclaimed with great certainty by Old Testament prophets. Contrary to Newman's asseverations, the recipients appear to have allowed a "fudge factor" for God's prophets.

Example 1—Jeremiah 34:5 says of King Zedekiah (see verse 2): "You will die a peaceful death. They will burn incense at your burial just as they did at the burial of your ancestors, the former kings who preceded you. They will mourn for you, saying, 'Poor, poor master!' Indeed, you

have my own word on this. I, the Lord, affirm it!” (NET). How and where did Zedekiah die? He died a blind prisoner of war in Babylon. “The Babylonian army chased after the king. They caught up with him in the plains of Jericho, and his entire army deserted him. They captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where he passed sentence on him” (2 Kings 25:5-6, NET). Nebuchadnezzar “had Zedekiah’s eyes put out and had him bound in chains. Then the king of Babylon had him led off to Babylon and he was imprisoned there until the day he died” (Jer. 52:11, NET). Hardly the predicted “peaceful death”!

Example 2—Elijah had predicted of Ahab that “In the spot where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood they will also lick up your blood—yes, yours!” (1 Kings 21:19, NET). That’s a very specific detail. Naboth’s blood was shed in Jezreel, where he had his residence. There, in Jezreel, Elijah predicted that Ahab’s blood would be shed and lapped up. However, according to 1 Kings 22:38, Ahab’s blood was lapped up in Samaria (not Jezreel).

Example 3—God told Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar and his armed forces would succeed in demolishing Tyre. “They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers. I will scrape her soil from her and make her a bare rock. She will be a place where fishing nets are spread. ... For I have spoken, declares the sovereign Lord” (Eze. 26:4-5, NET). “He will direct the blows of his battering rams against your walls and tear down your towers. ... He will cover you with the dust kicked up by his many horses. Your walls will shake from the noise of the horsemen, wheels, and chariots when he enters your gates With his horses’ hoofs he will trample all your streets. He will kill your people They will tear down your walls and destroy your luxurious homes. Your stones, your trees, and your soil he will throw into the water” (Eze. 26:9-12, NET).

The divinely predicted and detailed

destruction never happened. God later admitted such: “King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was rubbed bald and every shoulder rubbed bare; yet he and his army received no wages from Tyre for the work he carried out against it” (Eze. 29:18, NET). So, God said he would give Nebuchadnezzar a consolation prize. “I am about to give the land of Egypt to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. . . . It will be his army’s wages” (Eze. 29:19, NET). (Some biblical scholars question whether or not this new forecast ever met fulfillment.)

Bad Predictions

Ezekiel probably had the worst batting average for predictions of any Old Testament prophet. Read the detailed account of the restored temple that God described to Ezekiel, which was never constructed, divine blueprint or not!

Example 4—“In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage’” (Isa. 19:24-25, RSV). Would anyone have sufficient daring to tell us when that prediction came to pass?

Little wonder that Jerome T. Walsh has written: “Prophecy is not a mechanical process but a living word. Fulfillment need not mesh with prediction like complementary gears: if the central thrust of the prophecy is realized, variations in circumstantial detail are irrelevant.”¹

Let’s move on. Newman’s wording here and there throughout the article sounds as though he espouses a dictation theory of inspiration. “The prophets’ role was to speak the very words of God.” “Prophets in the Old Testament wrote down the very words of God.”

He elaborates, citing Micaiah: “A true prophet never spoke some of God’s words mixed with some of his own words. His

message was either completely true or else it was false.” Really? What about Micaiah’s false prediction given to King Ahab (1 Kings 22:15)? Additionally, what about the lying spirit that YHWH sent to the prophets to deceive Ahab (1 Kings 22:20ff)?

Perhaps Newman has overlooked that the words attributed to YHWH among Old Testament prophets reflects their own personal literary style. Has he also forgotten what EGW said? “The Bible is ... not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. ... God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. ... It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. ... thus the utterances of the man are the word of God”²

Evidence both biblical and extrabiblical points in the direction that in the ancient Near East, spokespersons could and did choose their own words to express the message of their authority figure (their king, for example), even interpolating their own words into the message that had been entrusted to them.

For this understanding, see “The Rab Ša-qe-h between Rhetoric and Redaction,” by Jerome T. Walsh, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Summer 2011. Walsh’s rhetorical analysis leads him to conclude that 2 Kings 18:22b provides not Sennacherib’s words but those of Rab Ša-qe-h (p. 271). Speaking of verse 23a, Walsh claims: “This clause spells out the specifics of a wager that the Rab Ša-qe-h himself—not Sennacherib—has just proposed in v. 23a. ... It should be construed not as part of Sennacherib’s original message but as part of the Rab Ša-qe-h’s elaboration of that message.

The sentence is best read as an unmarked quotation of an offer authorized by Sennacherib and made in his name, but introduced into the discussion by the Rab Ša-qe-h only as part of his diplomatic negotiations” (ibid.). Walsh calls it “the Rab Ša-qe-h’s elaboration” (pp. 274-275). “In vv. 23-24 the Rab Ša-qe-h makes his own intervention plain” (p. 276).

What Ellen White Never Claimed

On another front, Newman’s case would have been even more cogent had he reminded readers that Ellen White at no time and at no place ever claimed to be an inspired commentator who wrote an inspired commentary on Scripture. Those Adventists who refer to her writings as an “inspired commentary” are just plain wrong, ignoring her repeated statements about the role of her writings serving as a lesser light pointing to the greater light, etc. Newman makes her assertions to this effect quite clear. We need to be told again and again that this perspective (that Ellen White never wrote an inspired commentary) grows out of Ellen White’s own explicit asseverations and is not imposed on her by “doubters.”

There’s one small inconsistency I think I noticed, though perhaps I missed something while reading this excellent analytical piece. At one point in the article, Newman defines the term *prophet*: “The root meaning of prophet is ‘to see, perceive, understand’” (p. 15). He is correct. The prophet’s chief function was to address the people on God’s behalf, having been inspired (commissioned) by his Spirit. Newman words it this way: “Each in some way claimed to be communicating a divine message” (p. 15). However, later in the article he writes that by New Testament times “the meaning of the word *prophet* had changed ... It had lost its meaning of prediction, foretelling the future” (p. 16). If I read Newman correctly, forecasting the future was not the Old Testament meaning of the word

prophet. That being the case, how had that meaning, which the term never had, come to be lost?

Might the discussion about Old Testament Bible writers, New Testament writers, and Ellen G. White be better framed under the rubric of inspiration rather than of titles, such as seer, prophet, apostle, messenger, etc.? Ellen White never claimed the title *prophet*. We attribute that job description to her. However, if her self-image as a *messenger* is correct, how does that differentiate her from the Old Testament prophets, whose chief role was to relay divine messages to the people?

Even then, although Adventists by and large do not accept the concept of “degrees of inspiration” (thanks to Ellen White’s opposition to the term), internal evidence from Scripture makes it quite clear that there are varieties of manifestations of the dynamic of inspiration. Some inspired writers, as George Rice has so clearly pointed out, needed no revelation but relied on eyewitness testimony (such as Luke). Expanding on this perspective, we need to recall biblical evidence which reveals that other inspired individuals felt moved to write letters of instruction with both positive and negative admonition (such as Paul). Yet additional inspired writers received direct communication from God—person-to-person, so to speak (such as Moses). Still other inspired persons experienced ecstatic manifestations (such as pre-king Saul). Some inspired individuals had dreams and visions (such as Daniel). Other inspired writers heard “auditions” (such as Isaiah). Some inspired persons appear to have had nightmares (such as Ezekiel). Yet other inspired writers were moved with emotion to write poetry (such as David). And still other recipients of inspiration played—prophesied on—musical instruments (such as the sons of Asaph and Jeduthun).

Homiletical Ellen White

Another point may be in order. And it

is here where I suspect certain church administrators just might go ballistic, because we have seen that precedent when they dealt with Des Ford. Newman avers that “Ellen White when using Scripture is mostly ‘homiletical’ and ‘evangelistic’”—citing terms used by Robert Olsen. Or as Newman frames it elsewhere in the article: The prophet’s speaking on behalf of God “was for encouragement, exhortation, or reproof, and it was rarely predictive” (p. 15). I am convinced that both Olsen and Newman are correct in their observations, which is in essence precisely what Ford said when he insisted that Ellen White’s role in the church was “pastoral.” Certain church bureaucrats blew a gasket over Ford’s terminology, accusing him of “not believing in Ellen White”—a ludicrous allegation when it comes to Ford, as anyone who personally knows him will acknowledge! But it is precisely this function that other inspired writers fulfilled—be it seer, prophet, apostle, messenger, or ...

Many thanks to Newman for also underscoring Ellen White’s maturation not only intellectually but also spiritually! The logical conclusion from this data is that she (like the Old Testament and New Testament prophets) could make—and did make—factual errors in (1) grammar, (2) spelling, (3) history, (4) science, (5) exegesis, and (6) theology. (Because of space limitations, I refrain from providing examples of such errors among both biblical writers and Ellen White.)

Newman’s article should become required reading within every echelon of the church—from persons in the pew, to local pastors, to seminarians, to overseers at the White Estate, to administrators throughout the hierarchy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. 🇺🇸

¹ Walsh, *Berit Olam: 1 Kings* (Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1996), p. 358.

² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 21.

HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

By David W.T. Brattston

COMPARED TO 21ST-CENTURY BELIEVERS, early Christians wrote surprisingly little about homosexuality. While some Christian writers in the first two and a half centuries appear to condemn all forms of homosexual behavior, most commented on only specific aspects of it, such as intercourse with minors. No author of this period singled out homoeroticism as an especially repulsive sin, and when mentioned, it was only incidentally when discussing other matters.

Disapproval of homosexual activity—or certain aspects of it—appeared early in the church. In the New Testament, we find 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Contrary to some misinterpretations, Romans 1:27 does not say that it is a sin, but a punishment for prior misdeeds.

Some church fathers in the second century continued this seemingly negative bent: Aristides of Athens¹ in A.D. 125; the well-traveled Justin Martyr in the City of Rome in mid-century,² Athenagoras (also of Athens),³ Bishop Melito of Sardis in Turkey⁴ in the 170s, Bishop Irenaeus in France⁵ in the 180s, and Clement of Alexandria (dean of the world's foremost Christian educational institution)⁶ in the 190s. Another second-century bishop who made passing references against it was Polycarp,⁷ a disciple of the Apostle John and, later, teacher of Irenaeus. Polycarp was probably “the angel of the church

in Smyrna” addressed in Revelation 2:8. Another book of revelations, those of the Apostle Peter, was of like mind in the first half of the century.⁸ The recently discovered *Gospel of Judas* (also second-century) condemns it,⁹ inferring that it was a corruption newly introduced into Christianity by mainstream believers (i.e., not Gnostics).

Transitioning into the early third century was Tertullian,¹⁰ a converted ex-lawyer who became a clergyman in Tunisia and was the founder of Latin Christian literature. Always a rigorist, he was more prepared to condemn debatable practices as sin than were other writers before the middle of the century.

The present study concludes at A.D. 249-251, a time of severe persecution, mass apostasy, and upheaval in the church. It approximately coincides with the death of Origen, who had succeeded Clement as dean, and later became the leading Bible scholar, teacher, and preacher of his own day and for centuries afterward.¹¹

These were all voluminous authors who touched on homoeroticism only a few times amid a huge mass of material on other activities.

Pederasty

The most commonly mentioned aspect of same-sex gratification was intercourse with young boys. Pederasty was considered

sinful by some church fathers, who wrote nothing against relations between adult males. Among them were a bishop of Antioch (Syria) in the mid-second century¹² and a friend and financial backer of Origen.¹³ Four comprehensive collections of Christian ethics and life were produced before A.D. 230, none of which forbids homosexuality.¹⁴ One prohibits oral sex, but only by a woman on a man.¹⁵

Depending on how broadly or narrowly their wording is interpreted, some ancient believers may have censured only particular types of homosexual acts while allowing others. Polycarp, the *Revelation of Peter*, Irenaeus, and Origen prohibited “men abusing themselves with men” and “men defiling each other.” The question arises whether homosexual acts in themselves are abusive and defiling or whether God forbids only those homoerotic positions that abuse or defile due to other factors. After all, heterosexual relations may or may not be abusive or defiling, even between spouses. By being specific, did these early Christians suggest that some kinds of same-sex relations could be loving and enriching, and therefore permitted to Christians?

Some of the above-mentioned authors quoted Leviticus 18:22 to the effect that males are forbidden “to lie with a man as with a woman.” Although some homoerotic acts are imitations of



heterosexual ones, others are anatomically possible only between males. A conservative interpretation of Leviticus and these church fathers would forbid only the simulations of regular sex but permit uniquely male-male positions. Those magazines at the drugstore indicate that gays use a wide variety of techniques and do not lack imagination.

In addition to how restrictive an interpretation is to be given to “men lying with men as with a woman,” there is the issue of whether this prohibition is binding in our day. It would not apply if its sinful nature were rooted in social/cultural factors rather than eternal anatomical differences. In the world of the Bible and the early Church, women occupied a position subordinate to males, with a status little different from slaves or animals. Thus, treating a man sexually as if he were a woman may have been forbidden only because it meant subjecting him to an inferior status, thus abusing and defiling him psychologically and socially in that culture. If so, the ban was not aimed at same-gender sensual gratification as an evil in itself and thus might not apply in an age of equality between the sexes.

Anal penetration with a penis (sodomy properly described) was condemned in the middle of the second century by Justin

Martyr¹⁶ and the *Acts of John* 36. They did not mention other homoerotic positions and forbade such penetration in heterosexual relations also. It is strange that so few early Christian writers condemned it, for it is harmful in itself because too frequent indulgence weakens the rectal muscles and creates problems in defecation. The rarity with which it was discountenanced may indicate that some New Testament and other early Christian authors meant only sodomy when condemning homosexual activity.

Questions

The foregoing study raises a number of questions. Are all homosexual relationships abusive and defiling in themselves, or are they permissible when these elements are absent? Are all varieties of homoerotic acts a sin, or only those positions in which a participant is demeaned or degraded by the standards of his own culture, or are imitations of heterosexual positions? At what age does a boy become a man, thus rendering intercourse no longer pederasty?

The foregoing presentation partly distorts the focus and preoccupations of early Christians in two respects. First, homoeroticism was touched upon by less than 7 percent of the 500-plus extant Christian writings of the period. Ninety-three percent did not mention homosexuality. Still less did single it out for special condemnation but regarded it as one sin among many—no better, no worse. As in Origen’s opposition to “the lovers of money, and the lovers of ambition, and the lovers of boys,”¹⁷ the ancient Christian writers always mentioned it in company with other offenses, never alone. All of the citations against homosexuality in this

article appeared only in lists or general discussions—one passing mention amid a host of other material. No author in the first three centuries devoted a chapter, let alone a book, to the phenomenon. Most references consist of only one or a few words. Unlike some in the 21st century, early Christians did not treat it as the greatest sin or as especially important.

Secondly, early Christian writers condemned gluttony, greed, and untruthfulness at significantly greater length and with much more frequency than homosexuality. Individual authors and the consensus of Christians before A.D. 251 regarded these offenses as more deserving of condemnation than what a minority do in their bedrooms. This may help account for the absence of adult homoeroticism in ancient Christian moral codes. Selfishness, gossip, and lying appear to have been much more common and to have warranted more frequent condemnation in Christian antiquity than homosexuality. ☩

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¹ *Apology* 8, 9, 13, and 17.

² *1 Apology* 27; *2 Apology* 12.

³ *Legatio* 34.

⁴ *On Pascha* 53.

⁵ *Against Heresies* 4.27.4 and 5.11.1.

⁶ *Paedagogus* 2.1, 2.10.

⁷ *Letter to the Philippians* 5:3.

⁸ *Revelation of Peter* 32.

⁹ *Gospel of Judas* 38, 40.

¹⁰ *Apologeticum* 46; *Against Marcion* 1.29.4; *De Corona* 6; *On Modesty* 16.

¹¹ *Commentary on Matthew* 14.10; *Commentary on Romans* 4.4.8, 9.28.2; *Dialogue with Heraclides and other Bishops* 10.9; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 12.11.1; *Homilies on Leviticus* 4.4.4, 14.2.4; *Letter to Friends in Alexandria*.

¹² *Theophilus To Autolyucus* 2.1.

¹³ Ambrose the Deacon, *Hypomnemata*.

¹⁴ *Letter of Barnabas, Didache, Didascalia, Sentences of Sextus*.

¹⁵ *Letter of Barnabas* 10.8.

¹⁶ *2 Apology* 12.5.

¹⁷ *Commentary on Matthew* 10.24.

AS SOMEONE WHO GREW UP IN AND AROUND CHURCH, IT IS something I have heard many times. And anyone who has spent time around camp meetings, evangelistic series, and other regular preaching could hardly have missed the “personalized version” of John 3:16.* Usually leading up to or as part of an emotional appeal to “accept Jesus as your personal Savior,” it goes something like this: “For God so loved [*insert your name here*] that he gave his one and only Son, that [*if insert your name here*] believes in him, [*insert your name here*] shall not perish but have eternal life.”

For all of the wonderful complexity we find in the Bible’s story of God, the heart of the gospel can be summarized in a single sentence that even a child can memorize and begin to understand. And this personalized version is a valuable way of

The Creator DIED

BY NATHAN BROWN

emphasizing the personal love of God for each of us and the choice each of us has to make to accept God’s gift offered through Jesus. As such, this adaptation of the well-loved Bible verse portrays an awe-inspiring and life-changing truth. We need to know that both sin and salvation are realities we need to take personally—and seriously.

Read It Again

But it is *not* what the verse says. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved *the world ...*” and the word is *kosmos*, meaning “the world as a created, organized entity.”¹ That “John 3:16 is about me” is an important starting point; that the plan of salvation so neatly summarized in this verse has implications for the whole of creation is something we need to spend more time exploring.

Of course, this is not about mounting an argument for universalism—that everyone will be “saved” regardless of their choices for or against God and his plan. Instead, the focus is on God’s love that reaches out to all and on his purpose of working through those who choose to cooperate with him to redeem and ultimately re-create the whole creation. It is a broader

understanding of salvation, stepping away from the temptation to self-centeredness that sometimes mars the understanding of salvation that so easily arises in our individualistic Western way of thinking.

Yes, salvation is about me and my saving relationship with God—but it is not merely about me. Theologian N.T. Wright puts it like this: “Justification is not just about ‘how I get my sins forgiven.’ It is about how God creates, in the Messiah Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, a single family, celebrating their once-for-all forgiveness and their assured ‘no condemnation’ in Christ, through whom his purpose can now be extended into the wider world.”²

We can, perhaps, readily accept that God loves people other than just ourselves. He loves those we love, and we can rejoice in that. In addition, he loves those we reach out to, and our recognition of this is often our motivation for reaching out in the ways we do. But he also loves those we are afraid of, that we don’t know how to show and share God’s love to. God loves people—all people, everywhere, all the time. God’s favor is not limited to our favor.

Creating the World

Creation is one way we see this demonstrated. The Bible consistently points to the world around us as evidence of God’s goodness. Paul urges that all people have an opportunity to encounter God through his creation: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Jesus also referred to the natural world and the created order as evidence of God’s love and a means by which all people are recipients of divine grace: “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). As well as all of the goodness of the natural world, life itself is a gift from God and, regardless of the individual’s response or attitude to God, every person is a recipient of that grace.

But even this reading does not do justice to the breadth of John 3:16’s “for God so loved *the world ...*” If this summary of God’s love and his offer of salvation were limited to all of the people in the world, we would need to go back and perhaps rewrite the Creation account in Genesis 1. If this were God’s sole focus, the Creation poem would be much shorter. Rather than carefully describing God’s specific acts of creation on each of the days, the whole story could be neatly summarized by something like: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and then said, ‘Let us make man in our image ...’”

If God were interested only in “saving souls,” nothing

important happens in Genesis 1 until verse 26. Instead, six times in the six recorded days before there is even mention of human beings, we read “and God saw that it was good” (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The refrain is repeated on day six right before the creation of Adam. It becomes obvious that, as well as providing a home for the first people, God takes pleasure in each step and in each part of Creation. He even specifically blesses the living creatures he has made (see Gen. 1:22) before he blesses either humanity or the Sabbath.

Human beings do have a special place in Creation, and more attention is given to their creation in Genesis 1 and 2 than to the rest of the story. But it is interesting to note that the first “definition” of what it means to be human includes being created in the image of God and situated in relationship to Creation (see Gen. 1:26). Creation is important to who we are as human beings in relation to God and, while humans are an intrinsic part of Creation, it is clear that God has a special regard and concern for the rest of the created order.

Praising and Groaning

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, all of creation was affected. The reality of sin changed the relationships between God and humanity, between humanity and nature and, it seems, between God and all of his creation (see Genesis 3). God is still the Creator, and he still orders and sustains all life. But perhaps in ways analogous to the change in the relationship between God and his people, God’s relationship to his creation is rendered less direct and more difficult.

Not that there aren’t still glimpses of God in the created world. As noted above, God still speaks and works in and through the natural world. And somehow, the creation and the creatures themselves have voices that offer praise to God and echo the relationship for which they were created: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens” (Psa. 148:7-10, 13).

But even in this ordered praise, the tones are muted, the celebration is incomplete, and the brokenness is evident. The praise is mingled with groans (see Rom. 8:22). Life is punctuated by death. Creation is beset by decay—and somehow yearns for re-creation: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from

its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-21).


In a sense, the dislocation of creation because of human sin was most visibly demonstrated at the crucifixion. C.S. Lewis described the resurrection as the “great miracle” that introduced a entirely different kind of possibility into the world, but the death of the world’s Creator within the confines and limitations of that world must be no less a magnitude of “anti-miracle.” It is little wonder that nature turned away and violently revolted at this darkest moment in human history (see Matt. 27:45-51).

But perhaps the natural world could not then understand that even in this darkest of moments, the Creator was working to re-create—that even a Creator’s death is an act of Creation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ... ”

Agents of Re-Creation

Contrary to what has been assumed throughout much of Christian history and theology, the Bible is clear that the ultimate purpose of salvation is re-creation. God’s plan is for the world to be restored to its original goodness. As such, we are called not only to accept his offer of salvation but also to be participants in and agents of that salvation in our world today, in anticipation of the complete re-creation promised by God (see Rev. 21:1-5).

This has significant implications for how we understand our role in God’s salvation and our relationship to the created world in which we have been created and re-created: “We are not saved *from* the world of creation, but saved *for* the world of creation (Rom. 8:18-26). Humans were made to take care of God’s wonderful world, and it is not too strong to say that the reason God saves humans is not simply that he loves them for themselves but that he loves them for what they truly are—his pro-creators, his stewards, his vice-regents over creation.”³

Because God so loved us, we are called to love what he loves. Because “God so loved the world”—as a created, organized entity—so must we. Because we have accepted God’s gift of salvation, we seek that same salvation and re-creation for our fellow human beings, our fellow creatures, and the whole created world. And in a specific and special way, we are now God’s agents for serving, preserving, helping, and healing in our world—and to all of creation. 

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*All Bible quotations are from the New International Version.

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1956), p. 929.

² N.T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (IVP Academic, 2009), p. 248.

³ *ibid.*, p. 234.

Diversity As an Asset

BY ROB ERWIN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not now—and, after the initial generation, never was—a monolithic religious body. People with Adventist church membership status are diverse in languages, socio-economic status, racial identity, and even in religious beliefs. Some variety in beliefs can be explained by social customs of the various societies represented within the membership, and some by the seriousness of devotion to spiritual living, but even after those factors are taken into account, there is a diversity of religious beliefs among us—even in North America.

What shall we make of this observation? One response is to deny and argue against the observation, but the evidence is all around us and has been there for generations. Another response is to be energized to correct this unfortunate reality. In this response, the Adventist subgroups in political ascendancy promote their values and priorities and hope that the rest of us catch the vision—or, more accurately, *their vision*—of Adventism. Surely this would lead to a finishing of the work (i.e., the Adventist Church fulfills its triumphant mission), because the membership finally would be doing it the way it was supposed to be done.

We should not be surprised if at various times in our history there have been manifestations of political purges to purify the leadership of the Adventist Church in order to further these goals. Then, when another subgroup gets their chance for visibility, they go on their own campaign to fulfill their vision of the church. I have wished I could be in charge for the next cycle, because then I *know* the church would be what it was called to be. If I just could shape its destiny; if only I could be king!

Measuring Adventist Diversity

Obviously, this response is ineffective, too. We may have learned by now that diversity is often a very positive element in a social group. In this view, diversity is not a liability, but an asset. This concept of diversity as a positive attribute is difficult to accept if one has a monolithic view of Adventism, in which all true Adventists are “like me.” It is time that a new test of what constitutes a true Adventist is developed, and it needs to be more gracious than the conclusion that a true Adventist is “like me.” True Adventists could



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have differing beliefs, and real Adventists could populate both sides of some dividing difference. Uniformity in adherence and devotion to a particular set of detailed religious beliefs, sometimes known as disputable issues, is not explicitly required or expected in the Gospels or by Christ in his teachings in order for converts to be considered legitimate. This is a good thing, because such uniformity is not realistic for any group of adherents, especially as the group being examined grows from tens to thousands and as the time frame moves from years to centuries.

In the accompanying table, I have carved out characteristic tendencies of some of the subgroups within Adventism in the United States. The labels for the categories are inherently subjective and are not intended to be offensive; identities for individual readers will probably not line up in one single column. I have not worked to make the table unassailably accurate; my intention is to illustrate the diversity of religiously informed priorities and values among us. Most of the dimensions below are best considered as disputable beliefs, and we do often dispute

them among ourselves! *See Chart, page 18.*

In spite of the typecasting of various subgroups of Adventists in the accompanying table, the categorizing I have done is not urged upon anyone as a precise description. I am confident that many readers could revise the table above to make it more accurate from their perspective, but that is not my point.

The *totality* of the range of beliefs, values, and priorities indicated above illustrates my point: the Adventist Church is not a monolithic, homogeneous organization, but rather a diverse people, even in many aspects of their belief systems. The individuals within each of the above groups would identify themselves as true Adventists, living with strong convictions about spiritual issues, even though some may have grave doubts about the authenticity of other people with differing values within the Adventist spectrum.

New Criteria

Again, I ask, what shall we make of this observation of diversity



Dimensions (arrayed from political left to political right)	Progressive Adventism	Evangelical Adventism	Conservative Adventism	Historic Adventism
Secular Politics	Democrat or Independent	Republican, Democrat, or Independent	Republican	ignores politics
Popular Culture	values popular culture, observes spiritual themes embedded in it	values popular culture	has awareness of popular culture	ignores and avoids popular culture
Formal Education	college, graduate school	college, graduate school	secondary, college	secondary, college, or homeschool
Food Preferences	vegan or vegetarian, clean and unclean meats	vegan or vegetarian, clean meats	vegan or vegetarian	vegan or vegetarian
Secular Reading Material	fiction and non-fiction, local and national news, scholarly journals, websites	fiction and non-fiction, local and national news, websites	primarily non-fiction, national news, websites	non-fiction
Religious Reading Material	variety of Bible translations, Adventist and non-Adventist materials	variety of Bible translations, some Ellen White, Adventist and non-Adventist materials	KJV and NIV Bibles, Ellen White, official Adventist materials	KJV Bible, Ellen White, independent conservative Adventist materials
Religious Music Preferences	contemporary Christian, hymns	contemporary Christian, hymns	hymns	hymns
Views of Ellen White	denies prophetic authority	perhaps prophetic authority similar to non-canonical Bible-era prophets	prophet of similar importance as Bible minor prophets	full prophet of similar importance as Bible major prophets
Creation	regards Genesis account as a figurative narrative conveying spiritual truth	interest in literal six-day Genesis account, open to figurative interpretations	full acceptance of literal six-day Genesis account	full acceptance of literal six-day Genesis account as a testing belief
How We Are Saved	there may be multiple paths to heaven	by grace alone	by a faith that works	by a faith that works toward moral perfection
Perfectionism	rejects goal of moral perfection	possible only through substitution of Christ's perfection	possible in this life through God's power	possible and necessary in this life through God's power
Views of Remnant Status of SDA Church	rejects talk of remnant status, interested in interfaith dialogue	avoids talk of remnant status, views remnant across all faith traditions	accepts corporate SDA Church as remnant	accepts corporate SDA Church identity and personal identity as remnant
Typical Religious Priorities	transformation in Christ, social justice	salvation in Christ	doctrinal fidelity	doctrinal purity, triumph of the SDA Church

of beliefs? My recommendation is that we consider new criteria to be applied in identifying whether or not we are true Adventists. Persons wondering if they truly belong to a religious fellowship like the Adventist Church should ask themselves:

- Do I *want* to belong to this group?
- Are my beliefs and values (essential, core beliefs are the criterion beliefs in this assessment) *compatible enough* with the group's beliefs and values for me to be comfortable here?
- Will my association with this group be *helpful to me* spiritually? Am I open to learning from the group?
- Will I *belong* and be accepted socially?
- Am I willing *not* to actively work against the core teachings and values of the group or otherwise seek to disrupt the ministries of the group?
- Am I willing *not* to be monomaniacal about my personal favorite theological idea or disputable issue, in which every discussion ends up somehow being about my favorite idea?
- Am I willing to *support* at least some of the ministries of the group with my time, talents, and financial contributions?

If yes can be answered to all of the above questions, then the person should be a good enough fit to continue belonging to the group, and the group should accept the individual as a true member. By this criterion, the four categories of historic, conservative, evangelical, and progressive Adventists could all be legitimate Adventists—and should regard members of the other groups as real Adventists, even if they are not “like me.”

There is yet another group of Adventists among us, a fifth group not included in the table above. This group we could call “cultural” Adventists, whose fellowship among us is driven less by spiritual convictions than by routines and social connections with family and friends within the church. They value these connections enough to be in fellowship, but for a variety of reasons they do not have strong convictions about the doctrines of the SDA Church. They probably could answer yes to all of the above fellowship criteria questions, but they may not have thoroughly examined their own beliefs and values. Some cultural believers develop into very convicted believers over time, so let's keep them coming to church!

At initial admittance to membership, the Adventist Church has a valid interest in checking the new member's agreement with a set of fundamental beliefs before admission to the church; at a later time, the above criteria could apply. However, I hasten to distinguish that being accepted *by God* as a true believer at the point of soul conversion and being accepted *by the SDA Church* as an initial full member are different events in time.

Within Adventist history and its view of the future informed by Ellen White's writings, there is an expectation that believers will be “shaken out” at some point. With the frequently uncivil dialogue between various subgroups of Adventists, it is easy to imagine adherents at either extreme of the spectrum leaving the official church fellowship out of disgust. Is this a shaking? If so, we are losing people from both the historic Adventist

and progressive Adventist wings of the church; the apparent shaking phenomenon is an equal-opportunity offender as those with more extreme positions give up on the church conforming to their ideals. I also fear that we are sometimes losing people at the center out of disillusionment with the internecine feuding and weariness with the essentially political arguments among us.

Diversity As Strength

If we regard diversity as a strength, then when we lose adherents to the spectrum of SDA beliefs, we lose valuable assets. This diversity has the potential to correct or at least hold in check our worst tendencies as a group, and we genuinely need this virtue as one of the ways divinely intended for believers in fellowship to stay organizationally healthy and true to mission, a view supported by Ellen White. The Adventist Church is stronger when it includes diversity of beliefs, and we should challenge those who would say “good riddance” to departing members who are different from us. From this perspective, none of us has the place to say, “Love it or leave it.” We should be saying, “Love it and help it be better” by staying connected, staying in dialogue, and respecting the legitimacy of other positions even if they are different from our own. We can agree to disagree, we can respect the legitimacy of adherents with different positions than our own, and we can work together with a spirit of brotherly love.

We need a spectrum of beliefs within Adventism, painful though it may be to some of us. This diversity of beliefs is normal and ultimately good for the functioning of any church, if the leadership can “keep it together.” We need leaders who can guide our dialogue in the model of the spirited conversations among passionate family members, who disagree but still love one another and who regard the disputing family members as real family. Where this has happened, it has been a powerful witness to the grace of God in the lives of believers, a grace that brings a unity of purpose rather than a uniformity of disputable beliefs.

For many generations, the Adventist Church has been diverse in its members' religious beliefs. This diversity, in itself, is not a problem to serving God faithfully as an organization. However, the manner in which we have handled these differences during some eras has been a problem in our church, and it has led to internal strife and power struggles that were essentially a form of political conflict. It is time that we accept the diversity within Adventism as a given, as a potential strength, and learn to respect those members who choose to stay in fellowship, even though they may not be “like me.” Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church there is a variety of thought about disputable beliefs, yet we should seek to regard each other as legitimate Adventists. Diversity of beliefs can be an asset, and this diversity can be under the tent—or at least the guy wires—of Adventism. 🏠

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HOLDING THE GENERAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT ACCOUNTABLE



General Conference President Ted Wilson

By Eric Webster

I respectfully wish to hold the General Conference president accountable for his attitude toward Fundamental Belief No. 12. I believe that some of his utterances in his sermon on August 6, 2011, at the ASI convention are at variance with the intent and character of this Fundamental Belief.

Of course, “holding one another accountable” might not be the most Christian thing to do. It often elicits the fruits of the flesh, such as suspicion and a judgmental spirit. But the campaign to “hold one another accountable” was launched by Elder Ted Wilson in his inaugural address at the General Conference Session held in Atlanta in 2010. And so this is a child of his own making, and until the Lord shows us a better way, we will have to live with it.

While Elder Wilson was no doubt sincere in his attempt to hold the church on course as far as Creation and music and other issues are concerned, the invitation to “hold one another accountable” has extended the opportunity for anyone in the church to sow suspicion toward any other member or leader whose views of truth might seem to differ from his or her own. This often leads to a spirit of suspicion and division.

If the church carries on in this spirit,

we might soon have to change Christ’s identification of his true followers. He said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another” (John 13:35). We might be forced to adapt this to read, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you *hold one another accountable* to truth.

In this regard I am reminded of the following comment by Ellen White: “Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world.”¹ We certainly should pray that none of us will fall into this category of believers by our unChristlike attitudes.

A Faulty Definition of the Church

Returning to my contention that Elder Wilson’s suggestion made on August 6 is at variance with Fundamental Belief No. 12, let us return to his sermon. Toward the end of his message, he outlined several important items that he believed would help the Seventh-day Adventist Church to remain strong. The final one was to the effect that we should not invite non-SDA scholars and ministers to be the main speakers at our churches, conventions, retreats, or institutions. The heart and intent of this suggestion from the top runs counter to the core meaning of Fundamental Belief No. 12.

Look at No. 12 and No. 13 of our Fundamental Beliefs.² No. 12 deals with the whole, invisible church of Jesus Christ, his body and bride, while No. 13 focuses on the Remnant movement, or as L.E. Froom wrote, the “Movement of Destiny.” Take a few moments to carefully and prayerfully read these two statements and you will see that No. 12 encompasses far more than the Adventist Church.

Fundamental Belief No. 12 states in

part: “The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. . . . we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. . . . The church is God’s family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish.”

Some, on cursory reading, might think that this is referring only to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is not. Fundamental Belief No. 13 indicates that we have just spoken of the “universal church” in No. 12, and now we focus on the Remnant movement. No. 13 starts by stating, “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ”—the substance of what has been enunciated in Fundamental Belief No. 12.

Attitude Toward Non-Adventists

If non-Adventist ministers or scholars ask us what our attitude is toward them, we would quote Fundamental Belief No. 12 unashamedly. They would understand that we accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ living up to the Christian light they have, as we are endeavoring to do. We do not judge them by declaring that they are not members of Christ’s universal body.

Our practice at communion services corroborates our understanding of Fundamental Belief No. 12. We often

announce that we believe in open communion and that any non-Adventist Christians present may feel free to participate with us in the Lord’s Supper. This is a supreme acknowledgment that these individuals are accepted to participate in one of the most intimate and significant symbols of the church. We do not stop to first inquire if these worshippers observe Sabbath or Sunday, or how they view the immortality of the soul. We do not even ask them to first outline their health or dietary practices. We simply accept them in good faith as part of the body of Christ and worthy to partake of his body and blood.

Imagine if we were asked to make a statement in *Christianity Today* on our attitude toward other Christians and we presented three statements. These would be printed together for the Christian world to study. The first statement would be Fundamental Belief No. 12, the second would be an outline of our practice and belief regarding fellow Christians at our communion services, and the third would be a statement from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists discouraging our churches, conferences, and institutions from allowing non-Adventists to speak at our gatherings. Would they not be puzzled and perplexed? Would they not find the third statement out of harmony with the first two?

Not that I am calling for indiscriminate use of non-Adventists in our churches and institutions. But this would be better served by local decisions than by a blanket decision from the top.

I wonder if Elder Wilson has had any close and intimate relationship with ministers of other churches? Has he had an opportunity to belong to a ministerial association and to fellowship and pray with these ministers?

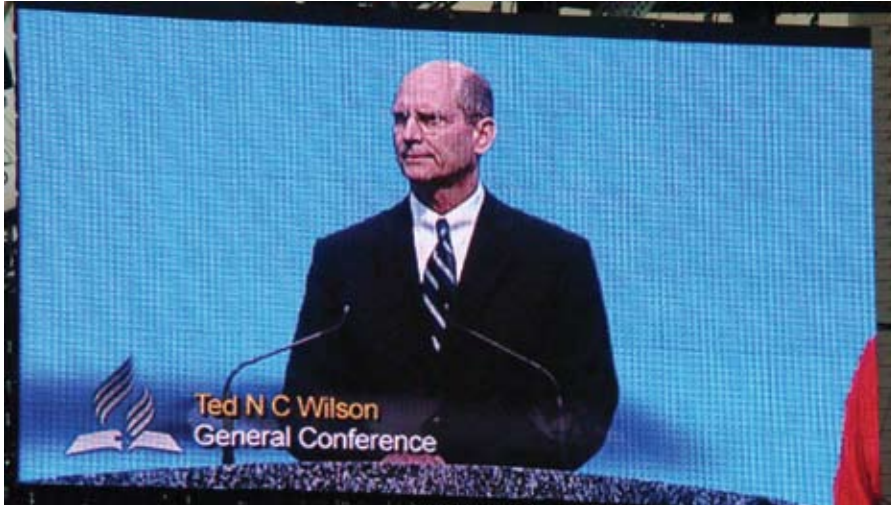
Association With Non-Adventists

My own association with ministers of other churches has been a blessing to me. I have been a member of the local Bible Society for years, and I have experienced the sincerity of many of these men and women who devote themselves to God’s work. Our churches have been blessed by some of these representatives, who have preached in our churches and promoted the Word of God.

For many years I have also belonged to a Ministers’ Fraternal while pastoring a church. I observed the members’ dedication and their love for Christ. When I first entered the association, a Baptist minister welcomed me with the words, “We will help you get straight on the Sabbath question.” I did not reply, and we never debated the question. As the months and years went by, that same minister softened toward me and even wished me a happy Sabbath one Friday afternoon when I phoned him.

As editor of the *Signs of the Times*, I began giving the magazine to these ministers. Even when I stopped attending the Fraternal, I kept on mailing the *Signs of the Times* to several of the ministers. I have been doing that now for well over 15 years. That same Baptist minister now tells me that he has the *Signs* next to his bed and reads the magazine before going to sleep. He reads it from cover to cover. He also places the magazine in the foyer of his large church so that his members can be exposed.

For a number of years, our little church company met in the Methodist church hall. The minister of that church also was a member of the Ministers’ Fraternal. I established a relationship with him. Once I had the opportunity of arranging for one of our visiting General Conference ministers to take the Sunday evening service in his Methodist church.



It was a blessing to all.

The time came when he and his family moved to another congregation in another part of the country. Just before he left, I invited him to take the service for us one Sabbath morning in his own church hall. It was a real blessing to all of us. I also presented him with a gift of one of our special Adventist books. I am still to this day mailing this man *Signs of the Times* and *Ministry* magazines.

Will We Interact or Isolate?

The choice is ours. We can either decide to isolate ourselves and cut ourselves off from other Christians, or we can interact for the sake of the gospel of Christ and the message of grace and truth for these last days.

If a local church or Adventist college or university decides to invite Philip Yancey to address them, it is their privilege, and this cannot be denied by the personal suggestion of even the General Conference president. We should be careful of “kingly power,” of which Ellen White herself warned back in 1915.³

Elder Wilson’s comments on non-Adventist speakers goes a step further. During his inaugural address in Atlanta, he counseled our ministers to find their spiritual light and guidance from Adventist sources such as the Biblical Research Institute and to limit their exposure to non-Adventist literature. It seems to make sense that if our members

and ministers should not hear an occasional message in word from these speakers, it would be far better never to read their books. The reading of non-Adventist writers would carry much more influence than the 45-minute oral message of these “apostates.”

Exposure to the written word is far more influential than exposure to the oral word. Are we really discouraging our men and women from reading literature from non-Adventist writers? Where would we have been if L.E. Froom had not exposed himself to a mass of non-Adventist thinking as he composed his monumental series, *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* and *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*? His work on conditionalism influenced even men like the late John Wenham and John Stott!

How about the exemplary reading pattern of HMS Richards, Sr., who exposed himself to a massive array of authors in his study? He remains one of the most powerful and significant preachers in the Advent movement. And what about the current preaching of Dwight Nelson of Pioneer Memorial, who appears to be reading a different book every second week? He is certainly exposing himself to a mass of non-Adventist Christian thinking. He is currently one of the most potent preachers of the Advent movement.

Should Clifford Goldstein be encouraged to cut out his wide reading of

philosophical works? And what about the example of Ellen White herself? The list of books she owned in her personal library reveals some 1,500 volumes.⁴ She exposed her mind to the thinking of many of these authors. She even found it in order to use many of these non-Adventist authors as sources for her writings.

If Elder Wilson is serious about limiting exposure of non-Adventist thinking in oral and written form, does he propose closing down our Theological Seminary at Andrews and also all of our universities? It is really impossible to run these institutions in an acceptable manner if confined only to Adventist literature. And what about *Ministry* magazine, which regularly publishes non-Adventist authors?

While I am sure that Elder Ted Wilson is sincere in his desire to keep the Adventist Church on course, I would sincerely appeal that he be guarded in expressing his personal convictions regarding our relationships with other fellow Christians. In his concentration on revival and reformation, I would suggest that there is room for us to reform in our attitude toward other Christians who might not appear to be of this fold. Jesus Christ had quite a bit to say about this.

May we all prayerfully and discreetly bring our attitude toward other Christians into harmony with Fundamental Belief No. 12 and with our practice of the Lord’s Supper. ✚

Eric Webster is an 83-year-old Adventist pastor who, with his wife, Ruth, has edited the Southern-African edition of Signs of the Times as a self-supporting ministry for 21 years.

¹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

² See <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>

³ See *Life Sketches*, p. 386.

⁴ Email from Cindy Tutsch, associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, Aug. 25, 2011.

How to Manage *If the Church Splits*

BY JIM BRAUER

I have heard more and more friends wondering aloud, “What is going to happen to the Adventist Church?” It appears to be heading toward a split. It reminds me of way too many marital fights that ended up in divorce. Sometimes the couple focuses on all of the little reasons why they can’t stand each other, rather than focusing on the important reasons why they got married in the first place.

The greatest tragedy in any disagreement is to fail to be Christian, kind, civil—and maybe even loving—in our deportment, discussion, and dialogue even as we disagree on fundamental issues.

Fundamental Values

In this time of conflict and polarization, I would like to propose some fundamental values that I believe are crucial and very important to remember.

It is not about: money (tithe), turf, or power.

It is about: the picture of God and being faithful to Scripture alone.

It is not about: fighting over policy, politics, and keeping my retirement.

It is about: being willing to stand up and be counted for the correct grace-filled picture of God.

It is not about: my behavior and keeping track of others’ behavior.

It is about: continuing to be filled with grace, even as others attempt to malign, impugn, or assign motives. God bless them!

It is not about: me, my righteousness, or Jesus changing me in order for the Holy Spirit to be poured out.

It is about: thanking God for already having poured out his Spirit (Ephesians 2) and for giving us access to the throne of God and bestowing gifts on his children (Ephesians 4).

It is not about: begging and pleading for God to give something he already has given!

It is about: allowing and empowering the local church to contextualize the gospel message so that the local church becomes a church of significance—salt in the world that has lost its interest.

It is not about: repeating all of the latest stories of brothers and sisters who may be attacking us or what is important to us.

It is about: sticking to the mission of caring about others and slowly earning the right to speak truth into a postmodern secular society.

It is not about: attempting to tear down the organization.

It is about: attempting to

dialogue together and see if there might be room to endorse a grace-based brand of Adventism and allow it to function side-by-side with the conservative brand, without attacking or interfering with each other.

It is not about: suggesting which brand is the correct brand, but rather recognizing that, just as in 1888, maybe the church needs to wake up and decide to finally choose Jesus alone!

It is about: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! Plus nothing!

It is not about: me, my behavior, my sins.

It is about: understanding all that God has already provided in Christ alone, and choosing to die daily and follow him as Lord, Master, Guide, and Friend.

It is not about: my righteousness—never had any, never will!

It is all about: Christ’s righteousness. His is the only kind. He covers me.

It is not about: cheap grace, doing whatever I want, a license to sin.

It is about: the joy and freedom of following Christ, recognizing that he thinks I am perfect even though each day, as I draw closer, I see myself as more of a sinner.

It is not about: throwing out the wonderful gift God gave this church in Ellen White.

It is about: recognizing her role as the lesser light pointing to Scripture alone. Her words are counsel, and we allow the Holy Spirit to convict and apply the lessons and principles as he sees fit.


It is not about: lobbing “Ellen G. White hand grenades” and hoping they’ll blow up in our friends’ laps so they will know that they are wrong, and in their dying breath will admit we are right.

It is about: knowing Jesus, who is the truth, the life, and the way.

It is not about: having the truth, or trying to prove who has the truth.

It is about: following the Lamb wherever he goes; welcoming other disciples; listening, praying, and following him together.

It is not about: declaring ourselves to be God’s favorite, his remnant, his only people.

It is about: JESUS! 

Jim Brauer is the Southern Asia-Pacific Division Adventist Missions director and project consultant.



Conditional Prophecy and Last-Day Events

By Alden Thompson

This article is supposed to be about “conditional prophecy.” But it’s such a scary topic that we will ease into it with a much-too-long preamble.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

“Conditional prophecy” is a scary topic because it so easily slips into a kind of all-or-nothing thinking that is even scarier, allowing small things to put big things at risk. Some, for example, link the idea of a universal Sunday law so closely to the seventh-day Sabbath that the Sabbath seems to waver if a Sunday law isn’t looming on the horizon.

The fear of collapse is a very real feeling. But when we measure it against Scripture, it doesn’t make sense. Furthermore, it’s not biblical. A Sunday law isn’t even mentioned in Scripture. It is, to be sure, an inspired *application* of biblical passages bequeathed to us by Ellen White, but that is a separate issue. Let’s simply look up the references for Sabbath in a good concordance.

The Bible begins by affirming the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation, and the fourth command in Exodus 20 confirms that view. But there’s more. With no mention of Creation, Deuteronomy 5 affirms the Sabbath as a memorial of redemption, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. But whether it’s a Creation Sabbath or a redemption Sabbath, it’s still the same Sabbath, and it’s rock solid.

The New Testament is equally clear, pressing the question of how to keep the Sabbath but never quarreling over the fact of the Sabbath. And here Jesus’ teachings and actions are a remarkable echo of Isaiah 58, the “fast” that loosens the bonds and lets the oppressed go free. The Gospels record five healing miracles

that Jesus deliberately performed on the Sabbath: a withered hand, a stooped back, dropsy, the paralytic of 38 years at the pool, and a man born blind.¹ We have much to learn from that cluster of miracles.

An Illustration From Adventist History

Before turning to conditional prophecy, let’s consider an illustration of the all-or-nothing danger from the perspective of an earlier crisis in Adventism, the debate over righteousness by faith at the 1888 General Conference. At one point, the larger issue was being debated under cover of a more focused issue, the interpretation of law as “schoolmaster” in Galatians 3. Is it the moral or the ceremonial law? Traditionally for us it had been the ceremonial law. But in 1888, A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner begged to differ, arguing that it was, in fact, the moral law.

Ellen White entered the fray when she heard a brother blurt out an example of all-or-nothing thinking: “If our views of Galatians are not correct,” he exclaimed, “then we have not the third angel’s message and our position goes by the board; there is nothing to our faith.”

“Brethren,” she responded. “This statement is not true. It is an extravagant, exaggerated statement. If it is made in the discussion of this question I shall feel it my duty to set this matter before all that are assembled, and whether they hear or forbear, tell them the statement is incorrect. The question at issue is not a vital question and should not be treated as such.”²

But it wasn’t easy. The issues so troubled some of the brothers that a motion was put on the floor to restrict

Bible teachers to teaching “only what has been taught hitherto.”³ One brother was so agitated that even Ellen White’s pointed rejection of the motion didn’t faze him. In her presence, he voted *for* the motion with both hands.⁴

As for Ellen White, the issue was neither the doctrine of grace nor the interpretation of Galatians 3, but the “spirit” dominating the meeting. Indeed, the bitterness she saw triggered some stunning statements from her. “For the first time,” she exclaimed, “I began to think it might be we did not hold correct views after all upon the law in Galatians, for the truth required no such spirit to sustain it.”⁵

She described how she felt when she reached her room after the discussion. “Whichever way was in accordance with a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’” she wrote with fervor, “my soul would say, Amen, and Amen. But the spirit that was controlling our brethren was so unlike the spirit of Jesus, so contrary to the spirit that should be exercised toward each other, it filled my soul with anguish.”⁶

Conditional Prophecy

Now this lengthy preamble about the dangers of all-or-nothing thinking applies with equal force to “conditional prophecy,” because that, too, seems to put at risk, at least for some, that other Adventist pillar: Jesus’ second coming. But questioning our knowledge of the events leading up to the Advent is a far cry from questioning the Advent itself.

The “commandments of God” and the “faith of Jesus” were the two anchors, the two pillars, that bonded early Adventists together. Indeed, when they organized their first churches in 1861,

they signed this simple covenant: “We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ [Rev. 14:12].” Central to the commandments is the Sabbath; central to the faith of Jesus Christ is his promised return. Let’s be clear: whatever we do with conditional prophecy or end-time events does not move a pin from those landmarks, the ones reflected in our name: Seventh-day Adventist.

Required Reading

I hope the long preamble makes it clear that there is no point in going further unless the Adventist landmarks are in place. When they are secure, however, we can begin to nibble on “conditional prophecy” in bite-size chunks.

The first step is to list the “required” reading for this assignment under four headings, with brief commentary on each. At the end, I want to call all Adventists to study this topic together.

1. Old Testament “Last Days”

Chapters. Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14 are three chapters about the last days that don’t fit tidily into the New Testament view. According to the New Testament, Jesus’ return moves us quickly to a perfect world. Revelation 20 describes a period of turmoil at the end of the 1,000 years. Otherwise, the transition from evil to good is clean, with peace during the 1,000 years, and peace again after fire consumes the devil and his supporters (Rev. 20:9).

But the picture of *gradual* elimination of evil in the new earth as seen in Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14 is quite different. Children are born and people die, though not before they grow old (Isa. 65:20-23). In Zechariah 14, evil *gradually* succumbs

to the good.

Something like 30 million American Christians, however, apply these passages to the 1,000 years between a secret coming of Jesus (rapture) and a public one. To be consistent with their view of the Old Testament, these Christians expect childbirth, death, and animal sacrifices during the 1,000 years, even though they are evangelicals who believe in the completed atonement on the cross! They also expect the temple to be rebuilt on the site of the Moslem mosque in Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock.

That’s what happens with the rejection of the idea of conditional prophecy. These devout Christians believe that every prophecy from God must be fulfilled in precise detail. Thus they move all “unfulfilled” Old Testament prophecies to the 1,000 years.

The second reading assignment points to what Adventists have had to say about all of that.

2. A Landmark Adventist Article.

An article titled “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy” was published in 1955 in volume four of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.⁷ J. Paul Grove, one of my professors at Walla Walla College in the early 1960s, insisted that we know the article well. What I have discovered, however, is that today almost no one remembers it. All Adventists know about the Sunday law. But very few know how the Bible, the Great Disappointment, and Ellen White come together in this remarkable article that takes “conditional prophecy” seriously in exploring God’s original plan for Israel. The third reading assignment tells that story.

3. A Crucial Ellen White Quotation.

A paragraph in Manuscript 4, 1883, is the crucial one, though it wasn’t published

with its full context until 1958.⁸ The manuscript was Ellen White’s response to the accusation that Adventists had tinkered with later editions of their books to cover up key aspects of the Great Disappointment and its aftermath. Her response includes this quote:

“The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it

Our question today is: Can Adventists learn from our heritage how to deal with conditional prophecy so that it strengthens faith rather than diminishes it?

has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.”⁹

Here is the crucial link, so listen

carefully. It was the 1844 Disappointment that forced Adventists to come to grips with conditional prophecy—reluctantly. But even though Ellen White addressed the issue pointedly in 1883 in a letter to a critic, she never used the key quotation in any of her published works while she was alive. Meanwhile, the mantle of what we might call the “prophecy-with-precision” impulse fell on the shoulders of the futurist Dispensationalists, the *Left Behind* people of our day. They know the future and have their charts to prove it. Our question today is: Can Adventists learn from our heritage how to deal with conditional prophecy so that it strengthens faith rather than diminishes it? That leads us to the last reading assignment.

4. The Motivational Use of Prophecy.

Jeremiah 26 and the book of Jonah show how God uses prophecy to motivate people. Jonah, for example, preached the destruction of Nineveh as a fixed event. No “if.” Forty days. Destruction. Period. It worked.

Conditional prophecy? The king hoped it was. Jonah feared it was. Sure enough, the blunt preaching was the right motivation. The people repented, and so did God.¹⁰

Jeremiah further illumines this “motivational” use of prophecy. In contrast with Jonah, he started with the “if”: God will destroy Jerusalem *if* you don’t repent (Jer. 26:4). But the people reacted as if he had preached in absolutes. “You shall die!” They cried. He reminded them of the “if.” But the truth didn’t dawn until someone remembered that Micah had predicted doom for Jerusalem—with no “if.” Yet when the people repented, so did God (Jer. 26:19, quoting Micah 3:12). In short, God values people who need repentance far more than he values

events. He’ll topple heaven and earth to make it happen and will eagerly change his mind when people change their ways.

The Practical

Anywhere and everywhere Adventists can preach that the beast of Revelation 13 is coercive and deceptive. Anyone who coerces and deceives is in league with the beast. Today, however, the great threat to our Sabbath is not coercive Sunday legislation, but secularization. Almost no one takes sacred time seriously anymore.

In the past, Adventist Sabbath-keeping simply echoed Sunday-keeping. Can we rediscover Sabbath in these new circumstances when almost nobody is keeping Sunday? Perhaps a famous Ellen White quotation could help us catch a vision of the Sabbath for the last days. When everyone else has abandoned sacred time, Adventists could be God’s people “whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole,” a people “who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”¹¹

Honoring the Sabbath in the face of death is one thing, but what an opportunity to honor it when all around us people are “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage” (Matt. 24:38). So let’s open our Bibles and our hearts. Let’s talk with one another and pray with one another until we can say with the believers in Acts 15:28 that our conclusions “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

¹ Withered hand (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11); stooped back (Luke 13:10-17); dropsy (Luke 14:1-6); paralytic at the pool (John 5); man born blind (John 9). See John Brunt, *A Day for Healing* (Review and Herald, 1981).

² Ellen G. White, Manuscript 24, 1888, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 220.

³ The crucial line is from Ellen G. White in Manuscript 8a, 1888, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 133: “Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught

hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak.”

⁴ See LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Review and Herald, 1971), pp. 253-254.

⁵ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 8a, 1888, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 221.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 223.

⁷ “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4 (Review and Herald, 1955), pp. 25-38.

⁸ Five paragraphs from Manuscript 4 had appeared in *Evangelism* (Review and Herald, 1946), pp. 695-696. But the full manuscript was not published until 1958, in *Selected Messages*, Book 1. Neither source indicates the original recipient of the manuscript.

⁹ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 4, 1883, *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (Review and Herald, 1958), p. 67 [also published in *Evangelism* (Review and Herald, 1946), p. 695].

¹⁰ The KJV of Jonah 3:10 states that God “repented,” the NRSV says God “changed his mind.”

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Pacific Press, 1903), p. 57.



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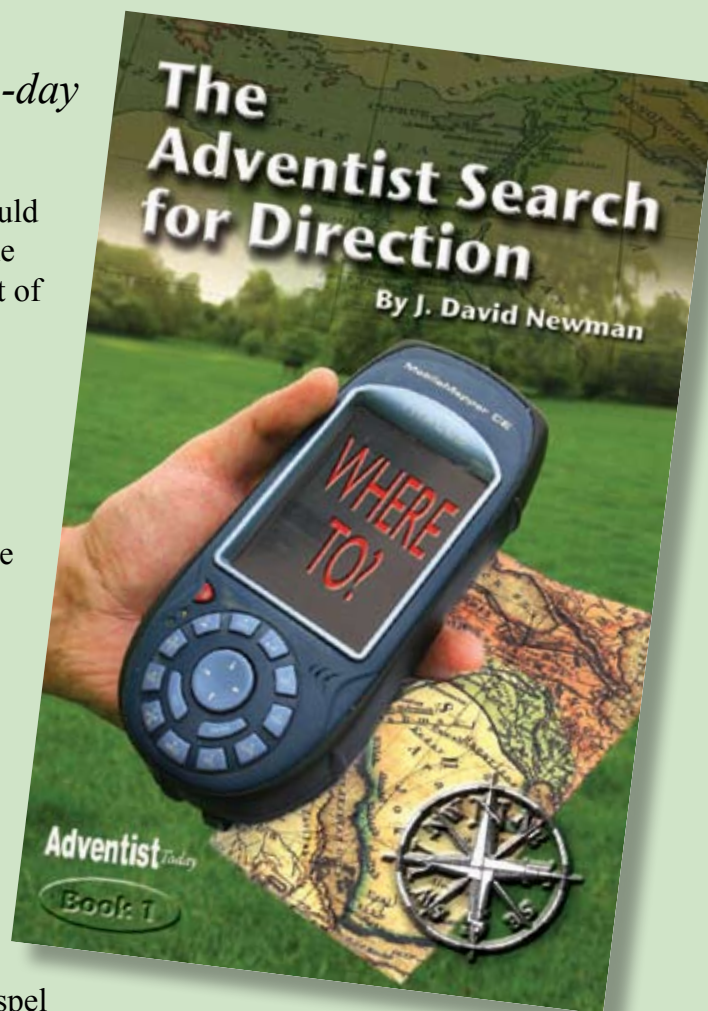
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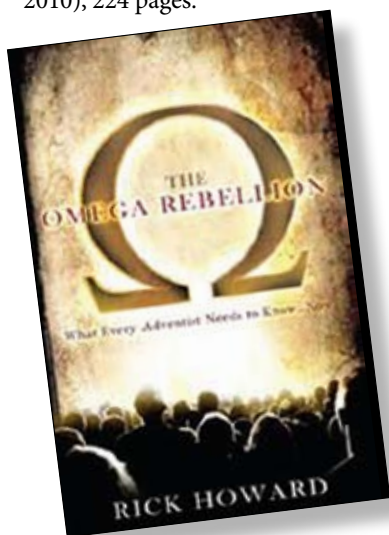


About the Author: Dr. Newman is a highly successful pastor whose church has doubled in size and now numbers 700 souls since he became its pastor a few years ago. Son of missionary parents who has lived in many parts of the world and for many years edited *Ministry* magazine for the General Conference, Dr. Newman is considered one of Adventism’s most successful pastors and sources of ideas for expanding and growing the church in changing times.

Is Spiritual Formation Bad for Us?

By Kenley D. Hall

Howard, Rick, *The Omega Rebellion: What Every Adventist Needs to Know...Now.* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2010), 224 pages.



Beginning in 2009, a growing debate emerged in the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the teaching of spiritual formation in various Adventist universities and in particular at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. The proliferation of books and websites promoting a form of mystic and Eastern spirituality has alerted Christians of all denominations to the dangers of certain approaches to communion with the divine. Seventh-day Adventists are rightly concerned about avoiding mystical and Eastern practices as a way of communing with God. Authentic Christian spirituality is a topic that is near and dear to all of us, since it has been one of our core values since our formation as a movement in 1863. However, without an open and honest discussion of the issue of spiritual formation, we face a twofold danger.

First, there is the danger of uncritically embracing all forms of spiritual formation. Second, there is the danger of the proverbial “throwing the baby out with the bath water.” We risk rejecting all forms of spiritual formation, including principles taught in the Bible and espoused in the Spirit of Prophecy that are the very things that promote true spirituality and discipleship. We need these principles now more than ever, as the church makes an appeal for reformation and revival.

Rick Howard’s newly published book has fanned the flames of the growing debate over spiritual formation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But has his book made a positive contribution to a discussion that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does need to have?

According to the back cover of his book, Rick Howard has pastored for 33 years in the Eastern and Central United States. He claims that his five-year involvement in the occult world, and the subsequent light of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, provide him with unique insight into the last-day deception that God’s people will face.

Exposing End-Time Omega

In the introductory paragraph in Chapter 1, Howard states that the purpose of the book is “to expose what may be the end-time omega from presently gaining a foothold in our beloved church” (p. 17). In order to expose what he thinks the omega may be, he recounts the trials faced by the Adventist Church at the turn of the 20th century, brought on by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the publication of his pantheistic ideas in *Living Temple*. Howard offers this lesson in history because, as he points out, according to Ellen White the church will face a similar deception in the last days. The title for Howard’s book and his method of exposing the final deception

are not unique. His title and his arguments are similar in many ways to Lewis Walton’s book *Omega*, published in 1981. The most fundamental difference between the two books is the speculative interpretation that each author gives to the Omega deception. Walton wrote his book as a counter attack to the teachings of Desmond Ford, Walter Rea, and Ronald Numbers. Thus he saw the Omega as the evils of modern critical thinking that were entering the church. Twenty-nine years later, using the same historical framework as Walton, Howard has reframed the speculative interpretation of the Omega as the practices of spiritual formation that are entering the church.

The sources Howard uses to make his case cannot be analyzed, since the book contains neither a bibliography nor a reference list. Devoid of sources, he resorts to rhetoric, emotionalism, and questionable reasoning to make his case.

In the first chapter, before even beginning to lay out evidence for his claims, Howard seeks to encourage readers to accept what he will say based on faith and not reason. He claims that “there were many undeniable providences of God that brought together those who recognize this deception” (p. 19). Thus it is “God’s leading to expose and explain those teachings hidden under the innocent-sounding term of spiritual formation” (p. 19). Whether by intent or not, the implication is that if readers disagree with or challenge the arguments that Howard makes in the chapters that follow, they are not questioning Howard; they are questioning God.

Howard makes an interesting secondary claim to unique authority on the subject of the omega. He argues that the five years he spent in the occult make him more qualified to see the last deception. It is a curious argument if you follow it to its logical conclusion. It

could suggest that time spent with the Devil is more important to discerning the counterfeit than time spent with Jesus Christ.

Questionable Reasoning

The most disturbing aspect of Howard's book is not his claims to authority. Rather, it is his questionable reasoning and the lack of evidence to support his conclusions. In Chapter 2, Howard begins to expose the teaching or program that he sees as the omega: spiritual formation. However, he very narrowly defines spiritual formation in the context of the Roman Catholic tradition and practice of spiritual formation arising from the teaching and practices of Ignatius Loyola. He has thus set up a clear word association that he will use throughout the book. When readers hear the term *spiritual formation*, he wants them to hear *Roman Catholic* and *Jesuit*.

He uses such a word association for his sweeping claim that the spiritual exercises of Ignatius (of the Jesuit order) are the foundation for all spiritual formation. Notice his logic. Because he narrowly defines spiritual formation in a Roman Catholic context, it follows then that all spiritual formation is based on the theology of a Jesuit; thus this must also be the theology behind the teaching of Adventist leaders who have been trained in spiritual formation.

Howard conveniently ignores (or is ignorant of) the fact that in academic circles the expression *spiritual formation* is used for growth toward spiritual maturity through the process of discipleship and sanctification. Of course, this is because the omission of a bibliography or reference list suggests that he has not really researched the topic.

It is unfair and untrue to state that the

term *spiritual formation* is inherently evil and should be associated only with Catholic mysticism. Through his narrow interpretation of spiritual formation, Howard seeks to make people "an offender for a word." Perhaps he should heed this counsel of Ellen White: "There are some who imagine that it is their duty to be church tinkers. It is agreeable to their natural feelings to be seeking spot and stain in others; they watch diligently for something to reprove, and they become narrower and narrower in their ideas, until they are ready to make one an offender for a word."¹

Sweeping Accusations

Throughout the book Howard makes sweeping accusations yet offers no evidence of their validity other than word association. Note how, in the examples below, he makes someone an offender for a word. He offers the following quote from an Adventist pastor:

"Without spiritual formation, a person would be 'spiritually uncivilized.' It is the process by which they can go from being an infant to spiritual maturity ... developing the potential that God's put within you" (p. 119). Howard then makes the sweeping claim that "the opinion exists with [Richard] Foster, [Henri] Nouwen, and the unnamed Adventist pastor that spiritual advancement will only take place when one masters the ability to enter into the mystical silence of contemplative prayer" (p. 120). This claim is completely unsupported by the pastor's quote, in which there is no talk of mystical silence or contemplative prayer. Very literally Howard has put words into this pastor's mouth.

Notice how Howard again manipulates a quote from an unnamed Seventh-day Adventist pastor:

"Real spiritual formation is a process

of growing more and more in tune to discernment of *God's voice* as well as more and more tuned to discernment of God's moving in my life, in the ordinary of life, as well as even in the difficult times of life. That's where real spiritual formation, or at least the value of spiritual formation, is seen" (p. 124).

It should be noted that we are not told the context of the larger conversation of which this quote was a part, nor is any reference given for the quotation. We are just supposed to trust that some Adventist pastor, at some unknown time and in an unknown context, made this statement. After presenting the quotation, Howard follows his word association argument. He tells the reader to note "how this pastor spoke of 'the discernment of God's voice' as a part of his experience" (p. 125). He then suggests that because discerning the voice of God is often the main attraction of contemplative prayer, the pastor must be talking about contemplative prayer. Yet note that the pastor never talks about contemplative prayer. Howard is merely trying to make him an offender for a word.

In an interesting contradiction, the author asserts under the chapter titled "Rebellion" that in response to his personal cry to God for help to understand why people are chasing after his interpretation of the omega deception, he heard the answer "Rebellion!" He goes on to say: "It was unmistakable. I knew it was not my mind's voice, but the Lord's" (p. 156). How did he know it was not his voice but the Lord's? He had to be able to discern the Lord's voice. So Howard can discern the Lord's voice; but when a pastor expresses that desire, somehow it is inherently wrong? Of course, in the dizzying logic of Howard, that is because the pastor was talking about discerning God's voice in the context of spiritual formation, and according to Howard, all

spiritual formation is Roman Catholic and Jesuit.

Catholic Mysticism

Howard offers another quote taken from an Adventist website to prove that Catholic mysticism is slipping into the church. In response to a question about a favorite memory from GODencounters, a pastor answered, “lingering in the presence of God” (p. 114). Before offering the quote, Howard suggests that the answer is most telling. It seems that according to Howard, it should concern us that a pastor desires to linger in God’s presence. According to his argument of guilt by word association, he points out that Ellen White talked about people during the omega being deceived about the personality of God and where his presence is. Thus what this pastor says regarding lingering in this presence of God must equal the omega deception about the presence of God.

The context of Ellen White’s statement on being deceived about where the presence of God is was made in the context of Dr. Kellogg’s pantheistic views that God is everything and in everything. However, Howard twists this argument to suggest that those who talk about having Jesus in their hearts have displaced the presence of Jesus from the temple in heaven and cancelled out the need for a sanctuary in heaven. Somehow he misses the fact that Scripture presents not an either/or but a both/and. Jesus works as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 5:14-16; 9:12) and also dwells within our heart temples through the presence of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Cor. 4:10).

Ultimately Howard’s whole argument about the presence of God should be disconcerting for Seventh-day Adventists. He narrowly defines the presence of God, arguing, “could it

be considered that those who practice spiritual formation have their own personal sanctuary which they carry with them in their hearts; a sanctuary replacing the genuine, the one the Lord pitched and not man? ... To place the person of Jesus inside all human hearts is without a doubt pantheistic (p. 135). His argument turns the Apostle Paul into a pantheist for claiming that “Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV). Additionally, his narrow argument turns Ellen White into a pantheist when she says: “We may drink, and drink again, and ever find a fresh supply. He in whom Christ dwells has within himself the fountain of blessing, ‘a well of water springing up into everlasting life.’ From this source he may draw strength and grace sufficient for all his needs.”² Ultimately, Howard’s position about the presence of Jesus in the light of “the law and the testimony” must be seen as doctrinal heresy.

In addition to these very isolated quotations, which Howard seeks to use as evidence based on word association, he makes other very broad and sweeping claims without presenting any evidence. The following are a small sampling:

“It is a fact that many in our beloved church have received training in spiritual formation, where they have learned to practice ‘contemplative/mystical prayer’” (p. 142). Yet Howard offers no evidence to back up his supposed fact.

“It is a fact, that there is a movement spreading rapidly through the Protestant community, called the ‘emerging church,’ whose influence has reached all the way from the local congregations to the universities and leadership of our Seventh-day Adventist Church” (p. 154). Once again, he offers high-volume rhetoric and no evidence to back it up.

Do Not Listen to Non-Adventists

Another argument that Howard makes in his book is that Seventh-day Adventists should never attend seminars, listen to DVDs, or read books by non-Seventh-day Adventists for the purpose of receiving teaching. He supports his argument with various Ellen White quotations. However, he never addresses the context of the statements that he uses. Nor does he address the fact that at times Ellen White encouraged Adventists to attend the meetings of others and to invite them to speak at our meetings.³

“The Lord knows that our knowledge of the truth is not enough to protect us from Satan’s final work of deception. ... the only way to victory is to have a personal knowledge of Satan’s plans and activities” (p. 177). This argument, taken to its logical conclusion, would suggest that it is more important to have a personal knowledge of Satan than of Jesus Christ.

While an honest and open discussion of spiritual formation is needed in the Seventh-day Adventist church, Howard’s book does not make a positive contribution to this discussion. Ultimately, Howard’s book is high on rhetoric with few facts to back up his assertions. It is a book that will appeal to Adventist conspiracy theorists, who do not allow facts or the truth to get in the way of a good story.

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¹ Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1995), p. 268.

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 187.

³ For an example, see her book *Temperance*, p. 218.

Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE



The Secrets of My Strength

The other day I came upon editor David Newman in the correspondence room of the *Adventist Today* building.

"Here," he said, peering at me over his thick granny glasses and handing me a packet of letters. "From your admirers."

I eagerly sat down at a nearby table—so eagerly that I sat on my cape wrong and almost choked myself—then opened the letters and read them one by one. Most, I confess, were from the feminine gender. "Adventist Man, why aren't you on Facebook?" implored one correspondent, who seems also to have spritzed her letter with some kind of perfume. But a few notes, in a brusquer hand, were from men, mainly asking how I got those muscles portrayed in the illustration.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must first

confess that famed action-comics artist Arturo Fenster-Tweeble let me know that for an extra hundred bucks he would be willing to enhance my biceps and pectoral muscles, so I took him up on it. Money well spent, I've always thought.

However, I am still quite a muscular and healthy guy, and in the interest of my readers I will now share some of my secrets. I must first give a generous nod in the direction of the Adventist lifestyle, which—as all well-read *Adventist Today* readers know—gets us into *National Geographic* and on "Blue Zones" lists with gratifying regularity.

However—and I don't know what got into their heads; maybe it was too many late-night Roma lattes—the Adventist Health Study people have ignored an entire sector of body-strengthening practices that church members regularly engage in. Let me note them here, to help nudge the Ship of Science toward a truer course.

Transporting potluck tables. I'm talking, of course, about the old, solid potluck tables, not the newer ones made of plastic. The old ones needed to be heavy-duty, of course, because of the many weighty casseroles they were called upon to bear. My boyhood frame attained the muscles you see in my picture (allowing for Arturo's hundred-dollar enhancements) by simply setting up and carrying these tables in the fellowship hall.

Using the "gag" reflex. It took awhile for the wonderful ethnic vegetarian food to penetrate my boyhood congregation, which meant that

the ladies of my church would dutifully work from early vegetarian cookbooks, producing earnest lentil loaf casseroles with the flavor and consistency of one of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian bricks. Each time my eyes fell on one of these productions, my involuntary gag reflex tightened my abs, toning them remarkably.

Carrying study Bibles. Catering to a decidedly unhealthy obsession, certain self-supporting Adventist publishers have taken to producing single-volume editions that contain the King James Version Bible, marginal references, Spirit of Prophecy footnotes, and the complete *Conflict of the Ages* book series.

Unofficial sources tell me that a new study Bible is in the works, containing the above contents plus the complete works of Uncle Arthur (including *The Bible Story* 10-volume set), the entire collection of 1888 materials, plus an optional glue-in insert featuring all published *Adventist Today* issues in 4-point type. This volume will be bound in leather, with a zipper, and will have two small wheels and a telescoping handle. If you buy a copy, remove the wheels, and within weeks you will become as muscular as I am!

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has "the answer." As a former member of "the remnant of the remnant," Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

Articles Needed

Please consider submitting—by email to adventisttoday1966@gmail.com—articles on topics of interest to *Adventist Today* readers, especially in the following areas:

■ **How Do We Understand the Times?**
What impact, if any, should culture have on our theology and practice?

■ **Beliefs—Can Thinkers Believe? Can Believers Think?**

How do we decide what is by faith and what is by evidence? Must we have concrete evidence for everything we believe? What is the role of science and faith? Are the Bible

and science interrelated, or are they separate realities—neither of which directly informs the other?

■ **Mission of the Adventist Church Today**
Is our mission still the same as it was in the 19th century? If it is, then why? If it is not, then what is our mission today?

■ **Hermeneutics—How Should We Understand the Bible Today?**
What are the key principles or interpretive tools for making sense in today's culture? What part does culture play in understanding the Bible, in Bible times, today?

■ **World View**

What is a world view? How does a world view impact the individual and the church?

■ **What Defines an Adventist?**

How much do you need to believe to be an Adventist? The 28 fundamentals? The 13 questions in a baptismal certificate? Believing the Apostles' Creed? How far can a member stretch the Adventist boundaries and still be an Adventist?

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