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**Searching for the tombs
of Noah's family**

Why I believe in Creation

**The Adventist
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**Media literacy
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**Thinking straight
in a crooked world**

3

Volume 17

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EDITORIAL

A choice without regret

“We left everything to follow you. What will we get out of it?” (Matthew 19:27, TLB).

We are so much like Peter in his query of anxiety. We have accepted Jesus. In the process, we have left things that were once dear to us—our lifestyle, our friends, our habits, our music, etc. And so it is not uncommon that we, too, may ask Jesus the question Peter raised. Is there anything real, meaningful, and purpose-filled with the choice of following Jesus? Will the end of the Christian walk justify the trauma of the beginning and the process? In short, is it worth following Jesus?

Jesus’ answer to Peter was precise: “Anyone who gives up his home, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, or property, to follow me, shall receive a hundred times as much in return, and shall have eternal life” (v. 28).

Here lies the Christian paradox. When we follow Christ, to lose anything is to gain everything; to suffer is to be at peace; to die is to live.

Is such a paradox worthy of belief and assertion? If you were to outline in two columns and compare what we leave behind and what we gain when we accept Jesus, how will the columns look? I can list at least three important areas where the gains certainly outweigh any possible loss.

Freedom

Freedom is the first gain. Jesus promised: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32, TLB). To understand this, let’s imagine two young adults—one, a faithful Christian, and another one living without Christian principles. The latter is likely to act without restraint with respect to certain things detrimental to life, such as, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, exciting entertainment, and in the relationships with the opposite sex. By contrast, the consistent Christian—guided by the Holy Spirit and strengthened by God’s grace—chooses friends carefully, avoids harmful foods, drinks, and drugs, and is wise in his choice of entertainment.

Which of these two young people would find it easier, stronger, and freer to meet the challenges of real life? Who will be really in control of his or her choices? Obviously, the one who has been set free by Christ.

Happiness

Happiness is the second gain. Happiness consists of a balanced and satisfactory life, at peace in all relationships. How is this optimum state reached? By following “the manufacturer’s instructions.” When we buy a new machine, it comes with a user’s manual, which explains how to obtain the best results in its operation and also lists a series of “don’ts”; that is, various abuses to which the machine should not be exposed. Only then the machine will give satisfactory and worry-free service.

As human beings, we find ourselves in a similar situation. God has given us in the Bible the “manufacturer’s instructions” to achieve the best results in the operation of our mind and body. The guidelines also include a series of “don’ts” regarding habits, attitudes, and practices that will damage our balance and destroy the harmony in our relationships. For the follower of Christ, true happiness is a natural reward.

Protection

A recent survey of the generation that entered into young adulthood at the beginning of the new millennium reveals the major lifestyle challenges they face—recre-

Continued on next page

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DIALOGUE has received correspondence from readers in 117 countries around the world.

ational sex, experimental drugs, and music mixed with violence.

The authors of the survey elaborate on each of these destructive practices. Recreational sex results in unwanted pregnancies, abortion by choice, single parenthood, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS. Experimental drugs lead to mental disorders, physical dependencies, social alienation, and suicidal tendencies. The mixture of music and violence has caused already untold suffering and death.

In contrast, the faithful follower of Christ is protected from those malaises.

Is it worth following Jesus? Try it. Reflect on Peter's question and Jesus' answer. You can never have a second thought or a first regret.

Erton Kohler, *Director of the Youth Department and Dialogue representative in the South American Division*

LETTERS

Too expensive for students?

Dialogue could be appreciated by a larger number of Adventist students around the world if it weren't so expensive. The US\$13.00 subscription price for a year is not much in a rich country; but in weaker economies, it's a lot. I doubt if students from developing countries can afford to subscribe at that price. They can barely cover their college expenses. I wish the Adventist Church could come up with a better system to distribute this publication in order to benefit more readers. Please lower the price; make the journal more affordable.

Moises da Costa
costa_moises@yahoo.com

The editors respond:

More than 90 percent of the 30,000 copies of each issue of Dialogue are distributed gratis among Adventist students attending public colleges and universities in more than 100 countries of the world. The cost of producing the journal is kept to a minimum in order to make it accessible to more readers. This is achieved by the fact that several editors volunteer their time. In addition, the Adventist Church at various levels of the organization provide subsidies to make the journal available free to students. Those who are interested can also read the best articles published in earlier issues by logging onto <http://dialogue.adventist.org>.

Each issue is precious

I wish to commend the AMiCUS Committee and the editors for pub-

lishing *Dialogue*. As one of the few Adventist students attending this government institution, where I am pursuing a diploma in printing technology, I consider each issue that reaches us very precious. After reading it, I loan it to fellow Adventist students on campus as well as to other Christians and even Muslims, who also appreciate its content. In fact, there is no church that produces a journal of this quality. Please continue the good work and increase the number of copies that are made available free to students in my country.

Seth Markus
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Addresses of Adventist universities

I am very pleased to receive *Dialogue* each time it is issued. As a graduate student, I find the articles extremely relevant and helpful to young Adventists such as myself, who are confronted daily with challenges that can affect our faith in God. The interviews with Adventist researchers are especially inspiring and motivational. In order to assist students who are about to obtain their graduate degrees and are seeking to serve in an academic institution, could the journal publish more information about Adventist universities around the world?

Andrew L. Miller
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The editors respond:

Congratulations on your decision to use your talents in Christian teaching and research! To learn more about Adventist institutions of higher learning, log onto <http://education.gc.adventist.org> and then click on "Adventist colleges & universities." There you will find the institutional names, postal addresses, and in many cases their website or email address. In addition, register free in the Adventist Professionals' Network and use the links to locate opportunities for employment: <http://lapn.adventist.org>. You may also benefit from some of the essays prepared by Adventist teachers on the integration of faith and learning that are available at <http://ict.adventist.org>.

Write to us!

We welcome your comments, reactions and questions, but limit your letters to 200 words, please. Write to

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Searching for the tombs of Noah's family

by William H. Shea

Explorations in Armenia identify possible burial sites of Noah and his sons, suggesting the authenticity of the Flood.

In the summer of 2003 I participated in a series of Bible conferences for Adventist ministers in Armenia, Georgia, and Southern Russia. While driving north from Yerevan, Armenia's capital, to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, we stopped along the highway to take photographs of Mount Aragatz, the highest mountain in Armenia at 13,419 feet (4,100 meters). This mountain rises about 30 miles (48 km.) north of the traditional location of Mount Ararat, located on the other side of the border with Turkey (see Figure 1, with map of the region).

Bible readers, of course, are acquainted with Mount Ararat in connection with Noah and the Flood, for it was "on the mountains of Ararat" that the ark came to rest as the waters receded (Genesis 8:4, NIV). A few days after the ark rested, "Noah came out [of the ark], together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives," offered a sacrifice of gratitude to God, and settled in the region (vs.18 and ff.). "The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth; and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth" (Genesis 9:18, 19).

After I returned home, I checked on the internet for many close-up views of various locations on Mount Aragatz.¹ From a study of these photographs, I was convinced that there were some rock-cut carvings on the southern slope of this mountain just above Lake Qare (about 9,000 ft., 2,700 m.). I wanted to examine these carvings, so I went back to Armenia in June of 2004,

accompanied by a professional photographer friend.²

Findings at Lake Qare

On June 28, we set out for Lake Qare on Mount Aragatz, accompanied by a guide and our host, the president of the Adventist Mission in Armenia. A decent road runs up to that lake, as the Armenian Institute of Physics studying cosmic rays is located there. After a series of delays, we arrived at Lake Qare and discovered that there was much more snow, ice, and mud than I had anticipated (Figure 2).

Upon arriving at the parking lot at one end of the lake, our guide asked me where I wanted to go. I pointed to the slope of the mountain nearest the parking lot, where I felt we might find some carvings. Instead of following a trail that appeared to be the most direct route to that slope, our companions suggested that we take the other way around the lake. As we reached the far point, I saw a large rock, about 4 x 6 feet (1.2 x 1.8 m.) in size. Approaching it, I noticed the figure of a large snake cut into its upper edge. From this I knew we had made

a find, because in the earliest alphabet the snake stands for the letter N (from Semitic *nabash* = snake). This is also the first letter in the name of the biblical Noah. The rest of the relief and carved inscription can be deciphered as "the dove took wing from the ark here."

Identification of this first carved stone led to a search for others in the same area. A total of seven carved stones were found within an area of about 25 feet (8 m.) from the first stone. Four of these depict outlines of the heads of various members of Noah's family—Shem, Ham, Japheth. The men are named in the inscriptions (which must be read right to left) but the women are simply labeled as "wife (*ashat*) of...."

One of these carved stones is important for determining the nature of the large mound on the other side of the lake. This stone was scored horizontally about two-thirds of the way up, to demarcate the peak. The figure of a man is shown on the right side of this peak. There is a two-word inscription written beside this figure: *Noach* = Noah and *qeber* = tomb, grave.



Figure 1. Region of the world discussed in this article.

Reading the inscriptions

I first noted the script used here on the other side of the border while visiting the Durupinar formation near Dougbayazit, Turkey, in the summer of 1998. It came as a complete surprise to find a couple of brief alphabetic inscriptions there, since I had previously assumed that any writing found in this area near the landing of Noah's Ark would be cuneiform. But here it was in an alphabetic script related to Proto-Sinaitic, the earliest written alphabet of mankind, known originally from turquoise mines in Sinai from the mid-second millennium B.C. and more recently from the early second millennium B.C. found in Egypt. Here was an earlier form of that Semitic alphabet found first in Eastern Turkey and now in Armenia.

This stone, with the two-word inscription (*Noach qeber* = Noah's tomb), seems to be a model or a marker of the burial mound of Noah that is found across the lake, in plain view of the carved stone. Unfortunately,



Figure 2. Lake Qare, with some of the ridges of Mount Aragatz in the background. It is proposed that the hill on the left of the photo is a burial mound.

this interpretation did not occur to me until a couple of months after I returned home.

A larger carved stone located nearest to the edge of the lake shows a more extensive scene that can be deciphered (Figure 3). In the right lower corner is Noah with his hand lifted up as he is shown releasing one of his birds. The dove (*yonah*) shown above him on the right, while the raven (*oreb*) is shown in the other upper corner. In the left lower corner opposite Noah, the ark is shown sitting on Ararat. There are

faint inscriptions for each one of these features. This scene implies that the mountain upon which the ark landed was this one and not the other one 30 miles to the south.

After we had been hiking for a little over an hour, a storm came up. So we had to leave the site prematurely. Nevertheless, we had been able to accomplish more than I expected.

The tomb of Shem

Much to my dismay, we were not able to get back up Mount Aragatz for further explorations. However, another horizon of research opened up for us. After a couple of days of sightseeing in the Yerevan area, we left for the town of Sisian, a three-hour drive south of Yerevan. On a Friday morning we drove just 3 kilometers south of Sisian to Zorats Qarer, which is a large field of megaliths that some call the Armenian Stonehenge. While the standing stones at Zorats Qarer are not as tall as those in Stonehenge in England, there are many more of them and they are spread out over a much larger area (Figure 4). Some Armenian anthropologist or archaeologist has numbered most of them with white paint. The highest number that I saw was 180 and there may well be more than that. They are spread out close to over a quarter of a mile, in distinctive rows (Figure 5).

We spent more than two hours photographing about 60 of these standing stones. Many of them have short inscriptional labels or reliefs, in varying degrees of illegibility because of weathering and overgrowth of lichens. The inscriptions, when legible, utilized the same early alphabet that we had seen on Mount Aragatz.

For lack of any better explanation, the common Armenian interpretation of this field is that it may represent ancient astronomical markers, similar to Stonehenge. But Zorats Qarer is quite different from Stonehenge—especially in that at its center there is a tomb. The important question

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Figure 3. Sketch of the carved inscriptions. Reading from right to left, the word Noah appears spelled out on the lower right of the carved stone, where he is depicted with his sons. The word Ararat is carved on the lower left, with the ark above it (*tybah* = ark). The head of God (*Elohim, Yhwh*) appears in the center, in front of the ark. The words for raven (*oryb*) and dove (*yonah*) are written and depicted on the upper left and right of the stone, respectively.

then is, Who is buried in the tomb? The weathered inscriptions provide the answer to this question. A number of them refer to the tomb of Shem and his wife. One of the clearer inscriptions can be read on one of the markers (Figure 6). The word *qeber* is written down the left side of the stela. Then the name of *Shem* with its three short and simple letters is written down the right side of the stela and again, in smaller letters, down the lower part of the center. Other names of the men in Noah's family are found here too, but none of them have the word for "grave" associated with them. Thus the important grave at the center of this complex should be that of Shem and his wife. (Or his wife may be buried in the secondary tomb just to the south of the central grave.) This site is located approximately four hours south of, I believe, what is the burial mound of Noah and his wife on Mount Aragatz.

The tomb of Japheth

With our spirits buoyed considerably by the discoveries at Zorats Qarer, we took another excursion to a large valley three hours' drive south of Sisian. The valley was deep, and a switchback road wound down to the bottom where we took a pleasant swim in a geothermal spring. Then we followed the winding road up the other side of the valley to the Tatev Monastery.

I was surprised to find more Noachic type of inscriptions on three very large blocks of stone in the courtyard of the monastery. The monks who built the monastery about A.D. 1000 were careful to preserve

the back sides of these three stones when they carved their own inscriptions on their front sides. On the back sides of those three stones the name of Shem can be read in the middle stone, Ham is found on the right, and Japheth on the left. Where the monks obtained these old blocks of stone is unknown to us, but it presaged of an even more important discovery as we retraced our route back down into the valley and up on the other side.

As we came up out of the valley on its north side, our host and driver said, "Oh, I forgot to take you to this observation point." As we walked out onto the observation point on a promontory (Figure 7), I noticed two strata of rocks, the modern rocks on the top to provide the viewpoint and the older rocks underneath. These older rocks were carved with badly weathered inscriptions and reliefs similar to those we had seen on Mount Aragatz and in the field of megaliths at Zorats Qarer. This time the carvings revealed a connection between the word for "grave, tomb" (*qeber*) and the name of Japheth, another one of the sons of Noah.

This collection of inscriptions indicates that this promontory was not paved just for the use of modern tourists, but in ancient times it served as the site of the burial of Japheth and his wife. To emphasize the connections of this site with the family of Noah, there are carvings of his three sons on top of



Figure 4. Some of the megaliths at Zorats Qarer.

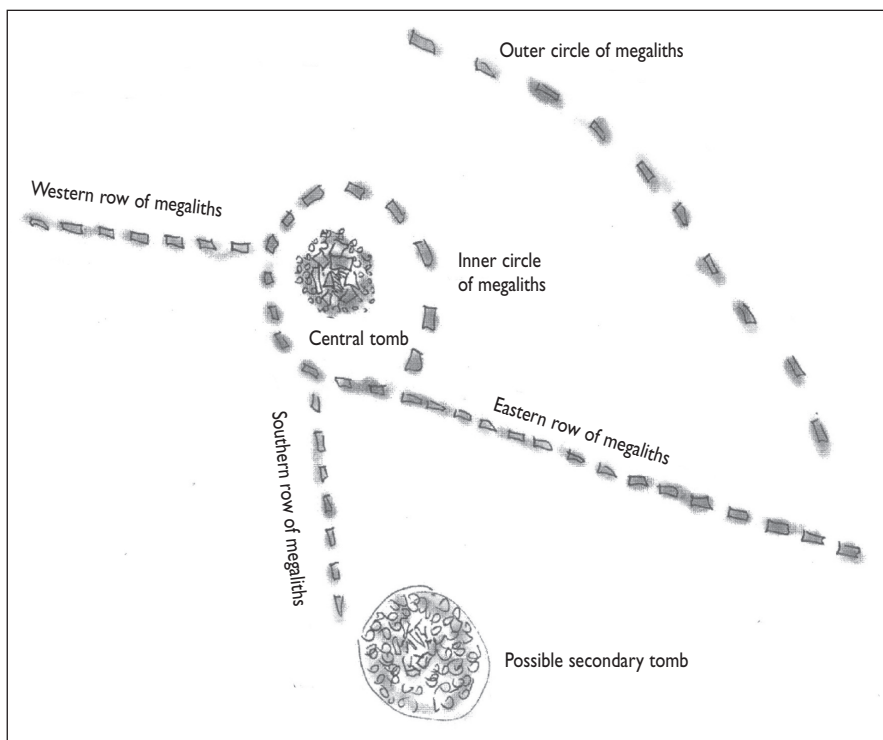


Figure 5. Diagram of the rows of megaliths at Zorats Qarer, as seen from above.

the columnar rocks just across the road from this lookout. In that location, Shem and his wife were carved on the right, Ham and his wife in the middle, and Japheth and his wife on the left.

Summary

To summarize the results of our explorations in Armenia, it can be said that very good candidates for the locations of the burials of three men (plus their wives) have been identified in Armenia: (1) Noah and his wife in the burial mound on the inside of Lake Qare at the 9,000-foot level of Mount Aragatz, one hour's drive north of Yerevan; (2) Shem and his wife in the grave at the center of the megalithic field of Zorats Qarer, three hour's drive south of Yerevan; and (3) Japheth and his wife on the promontory overlooking



Figure 7. A view of the observation point in the vicinity of the Tatev Monastery. The words for Japheth, *qeber* (grave, tomb), *Ben Noah* (son of Noah), and *ashato* (his wife) are found in one of the base rocks of this man-made overlook.



Figure 6. Marker for the tomb of Shem, near the center of Zorats Qarer.

the valley where the Tatev Monastery is located, six hours drive south of Yerevan.

Other visits to the area are expected to expand and refine the results of this research.

William H. Shea (MD, Loma Linda University; Ph.D., University of Michigan) served as medical missionary, seminary professor, and associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Although retired, he continues to lecture, travel, and write as a specialist in ancient languages. His email address: Shea56080@aol.com.

REFERENCES

1. On Internet, log onto www.masis.am, select Mountains and then select Aragatz.
2. Rollin Weber of Palm Desert, California, took the photos that accompany this article.

Why I believe in Creation

by Sean D. Pitman

The neutral gap problem helps us to understand better the reality of Creation.

Is God real? Is the Bible true? What about all those amazing stories in the Bible? Specifically, what about the Genesis stories? Did God really create the world and all that is in it in a literal week? Did that Creation occur only some 10,000 years ago? How could all these biblical accounts be true when so many brilliant scientists advocate otherwise?

Discovering a problem

Call me inquisitive or just plain annoying, but I came up with many such questions even as a young child. My parents did the very best they could to answer my questions. And, for a long time, they seemed to do a very good job. But, eventually there came a point in time when they just couldn't answer my questions to my satisfaction. That's OK, though. No one else could either.

I remember in 5th or 6th grade, thinking to myself that if small changes could happen over time, like slowly breeding a rose bush that produced red roses into a bush that could produce purple or even black roses, why couldn't evolution be true? I asked my Dad about this and he assured me that although "microevolution," like changing the color of a rose or the look of a dog, could happen, "macroevolution," like changing a dog into a cat or a pig into a cow, could not happen. I asked him why such "macroevolution" couldn't happen, given enough time? No one, not even my dad, seemed to be able to explain it to me.

I asked the same questions in grade

school, high school, college, and even medical school and was given the same basic answers time and again. Finally, after finishing medical school I decided one day that I would search for myself to see if what I was reading in the Bible actually made sense in light of the seemingly reasonable theory of evolution.

Changing without changing

After few years of serious search, it dawned on me that things can change without really changing. I had known about this interesting phenomenon for some time, but had never tied it in with the notions of "micro" and "macro" evolution before. You see, a famous monk, by the name of Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), a contemporary of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), discovered something quite amazing while studying pea plants.¹ Unfortunately, however, Mendel's discovery remained pretty much unknown until well after Darwin's theory of evolution became popular.

I'm sure even Darwin would have been quite amazed to learn that pretty much all of his most famous examples of evolution in action were the result of nothing more than Mendelian variation. But, what about all of those different finch beaks that Darwin wrote about? Well, they weren't really the result of anything "new." In other words, the beaks changed without any new genetic information coming into the gene pool. The pool of options stayed exactly the same. All the options for the different beak shapes were already there ahead of time—preprogrammed, so to speak. The same thing is true of many of the most significant differences between different breeds of dogs, cats, chickens, cows, fish, and so on. Every living thing that uses sexual reproduction has the ability to change individual reflections of the gene pool of that "kind" of creature without the gene pool itself changing.

So, now that I knew that change could happen without change happen-

ing I started thinking about what it might take to get the underlying gene pool to change.

Truly novel changes

The gene pool is basically a codebook with many different codes for many different types of functional systems used to build a living thing. If the spelling of the "words" in the codebook is changed or "mutated," the function of that code or "word" may also be changed or even destroyed. Such functional changes are what I would call "real evolution". And, they happen all the time. They really do. Evolution is a fact. But, it isn't quite the fact that most modern scientists think it is.

Consider the following word sequence: cat to hat to bat to bad to dad to did to dig to dog. That's an evolutionary sequence. By changing just one letter at a time we were able to "evolve" from cat to dog along a pathway where each step was meaningful and potentially beneficial in the English language system. Easy, right? But why is it so easy to do this?

As it turns out, every language system in the world has a higher concentration of defined or meaningful sequences when the sequences are shorter as compared to longer words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and so on. Just as an example, the English language system has about 676 *potential* 2-letter sequences. Of these, about 100 are defined as *meaningful*, creating a ratio of meaningful to meaningless to about 1 in 7. Now, there are almost three times as many *meaningful* 3-letter words and phrases, around 980 of them, but 26 times the number of potential 3-letter sequences (17,576 of them) resulting in a significantly reduced ratio of meaningful vs. meaningless of about 1 in 18. The ratio for 7-letter words and phrases drops precipitously to about 1 in 250,000.

The pattern is obvious and is essentially the same for every language. With each increase in the minimum

sequence length of any coded message in any language system, to include computer codes and languages, the isolation of that message from other potentially meaningful as well as beneficial messages increases exponentially.

So, what happens then when mindless evolutionary forces try to achieve a higher level of informational complexity? What happens when a sequence code steps off its beneficial island into the ocean of meaningless sequences?

The blind leading the blind

The problem is that natural selection is supposed to be the guiding force for evolutionary change. Yet, natural selection, as a very real force, can only see genetic spelling changes that result in meaningful changes in the sequence code. Nature cannot see actual spelling changes/genetic mutations. It can only recognize the differences in function that may or may not result.

For example, what's the difference between the sequences "quiziligook"

and "quiziliguck"? They are both equally meaningless sequences. Right? Therefore, changing from one to the other would not be detectable by a selection system like natural selection. However, what about the meaningful difference between "vacation" and "vocation"? They are only one letter different, but mean very different things. A function-based system of selection would easily be able to select between these two sequences. Right? Now, what about going from "vacation" to "vucation"? That would also result in a detectable change in meaning since the meaning of vacation is lost if mutated to vucation. That loss of meaning might be selectable as either beneficial or detrimental.

Note, however, that destroying something is always easier than creating something new because there are so many ways to destroy versus the relatively few ways there are to create. For example, there are many ways to mess up the function of the word vacation, but relatively few ways to find a new meaningful sequence of equivalent length. Logically then, it would be very easy for a gene pool to get rid of a pre-established function, but relatively hard for it to gain a new type of function.

Real life examples of evolution in action

Well, this is all fine and good on paper, but what about real life? I've looked into it in some detail now and it seems as though evolution works the very same way as I've just described for language sequence evolution. It is capable of "micro" changes but not "macro" changes because of what I like to call the "Neutral Gap Problem." At very low levels of informational complexity, evolution works just fine. However, as one starts moving up the ladder of informational complexity, evolution starts stalling out in an exponential manner until, for functions requiring a minimum of more than a few hundred fairly specified characters,

evolution simply cannot work this side of trillions upon trillions of years of average time. It just wanders around blindly and aimlessly forever at such levels of complexity.

For instance, consider bacterial antibiotic resistance as a famous example of evolution in action. Functional mutations in the underlying gene pool are actually responsible for the resistance of bacteria to the effects of this or that antibiotic. That's real evolution in my book.

Of course, many forms of antibiotic resistance occur at the very lowest levels of functional complexity. In fact, most forms of antibiotic resistance are the result of a disruption of a pre-established interaction of the antibiotic with a specific target within the bacteria. All that has to change is one or two characters in the target sequence and the antibiotic will no longer bind to the target. And, *voila*, the function of antibiotic resistance is evolved—just like that. It's quick and easy in real life because there are so many ways to disrupt the antibiotic-target interaction. That's why antibiotic evolution is such a problem in hospitals today. It happens so quickly and easily in just about every bacterial population when presented with just about any antibiotic.²

But, what happens when we move up a level? What happens when we try to evolve a novel function that is not based on the destruction of a pre-established function or interaction?

Interestingly enough, there are quite a number of examples of this sort of evolution in real life. Some of these examples involve the evolution of new protein sequences with truly novel protein functions. These proteins are made up of strings of "amino acid residues" that are very much like sequences of letters in human language systems. Different sequences and shapes translate into different functions, as in any language system. But, just like in any language system, not every potential sequence or shape has a meaningful, much less beneficial func-

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tion. However, for functions requiring only short protein sequences, the density of potentially beneficial sequences in sequence space is high enough (as discussed above for 3-letter words) that evolution can and does happen at this level of functional complexity in relatively short order given the proper environment.

A striking example of protein evolution can be found in Barry Hall's work with *E. coli* bacteria. What Hall did was delete the genetic codes or "genes" that produce a lactase enzyme in *E. coli*. This enzyme digests the sugar lactose into the sugars glucose and galactose, which are then used to provide energy for the bacterium. Hall did this to see if these mutant bacteria would evolve a new gene to produce a new lactase enzyme to replace the one that was lost when placed in a lactose-rich environment. Sure enough, the bacteria quickly evolved a brand new enzyme that did not have the lactose function before. Somehow, it just so happened to be one point mutation away from a functional lactose code in sequence space.³

Amazing! Of course, this is where most descriptions of Hall's experiments end, such as the one listed in Kenneth Miller's popular book, *Finding Darwin's God*.⁴ However, what happened next is most interesting. Hall deleted the newly evolved gene as well to see if any other gene would evolve...and nothing happened! Despite tens of thousands of generations of observation, these unfortunate double mutant bacteria never evolved a sequence with the very beneficial lactose function. Frustrated, Hall described these double mutant bacteria as having, "limited evolutionary potential." So, what is it, exactly, that "limited" the "evolutionary potential" of Hall's bacteria?

As it turns out, the apparent minimum sequence length needed for the most basic lactase enzyme is around 400 amino acid residues. With 20 different residue options, the total

number of potential sequences is a staggering 20^{400} . Certainly, there may be many useable lactase sequences within that huge sequence space, but no doubt the large majority of these sequences are not usable lactases or else Hall's mutant bacteria would have found many of them in short order using a simple blind random walk. The fact that Hall's double-mutant bacteria failed is very good evidence that the ratio of lactases versus non-lactases in minimum sequence space, at this level of function complexity, is quite low. Nature simply could not sort through all the junk sequences fast enough to find another lactase sequence even given tens of thousands of generations of time.

The outer limits of evolutionary potential

Beyond this level of complexity, nothing evolves. There simply is no real life example of any novel function evolving that requires more than a thousand or so amino acid "parts" working together in a fairly specified order. Yet, there are many systems of function, even in supposedly "simple" life forms, like bacteria, that will not work at all without a large highly specified minimum amount of genetic real estate in place. Take bacterial motility, for example. The flagellar system of motility requires at least 10,000 fairly specified amino acid residues, working in a fairly specific order, or the function of flagellar motility simply won't work at all.⁵ Such a high-level function has never been shown to evolve in the lab or anywhere else.

The signature of God

So, microevolution happens, but macroevolution doesn't. The reason for this seems so simple—exponentially expanding neutral gaps. Quite simple, really—even "elementary," as Sherlock Holmes might say. But, what a big difference this understanding has made in my faith and respect for God as the Creator whose obvious signature

and continued interest and care are written all over the world around and within each one of us. Of course, I've found a great many other overwhelming evidences to believe in God and in His word, the Bible, but finding the neutral gap problem is certainly one of the highlights.

Sean Pitman (M.D., Loma Linda University School of Medicine) is a pathologist and current fellow in the hematology program at the City of Hope National Medical Center. For further information and references about the neutral gap problem and many other topics concerning the theories of evolution and intelligent design, see his website at: www.DetectingDesign.com
His email: Seanpit@gmail.com.

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The Adventist Church today

by Bert Haloviak

A story of undimmed vision, generous giving, and steady growth.

One of the recognized phenomena of the religious world of the last half century is the remarkable global growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Once considered North American, 90 percent of the church membership today resides outside of North America, and its fastest growth is in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The church began the past half-century with 972,000 members in 1954 and at the end of 2004 the total adult membership has leaped to a staggering 13,936,932.

Back in 1954 Pastor William Henry Branson, then president of the Adventist Church, notified the 47th session of the General Conference assembled in San Francisco, California that the denomination had failed to achieve the goal set at the previous session to “double our membership.” That goal was something Branson spontaneously called for upon his election at the 1950 session and was a very unlikely statistical possibility. However, he told the 1954 assembly: “We have been richly blessed of God in seeking

to accomplish this mighty task. The entire world field accepted the challenge, and in every division our workers and laymen alike put forth their best efforts to reach the goal.”

The annual accession rate for those Branson years (6.3 percent) had never been surpassed and remained a record until the 1985-1989 quinquennium when the growth rate jumped to a 7.2 percent yearly average. So, Branson, despite his sense of failure, started our half-century of mission advance with an astounding success. Such themes as “Double the Membership,” “Revival, Reform, Evangelism,” “One-Thousand-Days of Reaping,” “Harvest ‘90,” and “Global Strategy/Mission” outline a history of 50 years that began with a daily average of 213 baptisms until that average exceeded 2,900 baptisms daily during 2004. (Average daily accessions from 1954 to 2004 are presented in Chart 1.)

Where our members live

Chart 2 informs us about the current membership of our church, division by division. We readily notice that 35 percent of our members live in Latin America, and 33 percent dwell in Africa. While some 19 percent live in Asia, North America and Europe have about 9 percent of the church’s membership. We also notice from this chart that six of the current world divisions surpass the one-million-member mark and of those, three have more than two million members.

During this past five years, the North American Division attained one-million-member status. The Southern Asia Division is poised to reach that status in the coming quinquennium. The East-Central Africa, Inter-American, and South American divisions all surpassed the two-million-member total this past quinquennium, and the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division is on the horizon to do so by the next General Conference session. At the end of 2004, our three two-mil-

lion-member divisions had a membership greater than the entire church in 1991, only 14 years ago. Today it is not just divisions that are reaching the one-million-member mark. *Countries* are doing so as well. Brazil passed the one-million membership mark in the past quinquennium and India, the Philippines, and the United States are poised to do so within the next five years.

Where our newest members live

“I know where you live,” said Jesus to the Pergamum church through John the Revelator (Revelation 2:13, NIV). Jesus addressed the fact that the Pergamum believers faced difficult circumstances when they accepted the gospel. It is so even today, and Jesus still knows where the newest believers live.

Because of the commitment of those who preceded us, we are able today to rejoice in more than five million accessions during the past quinquennium. That calculates to an average of 2,765 each day of the five-year period. The daily average of accessions for 2004 was 2,933, and most recently 2,991 for the first quarter of 2005, perhaps indicating a strong trend for the future. A new kind of million-member-club was established this quinquennium when one division, the South American Division, celebrated more than one million new members entering its membership rolls.

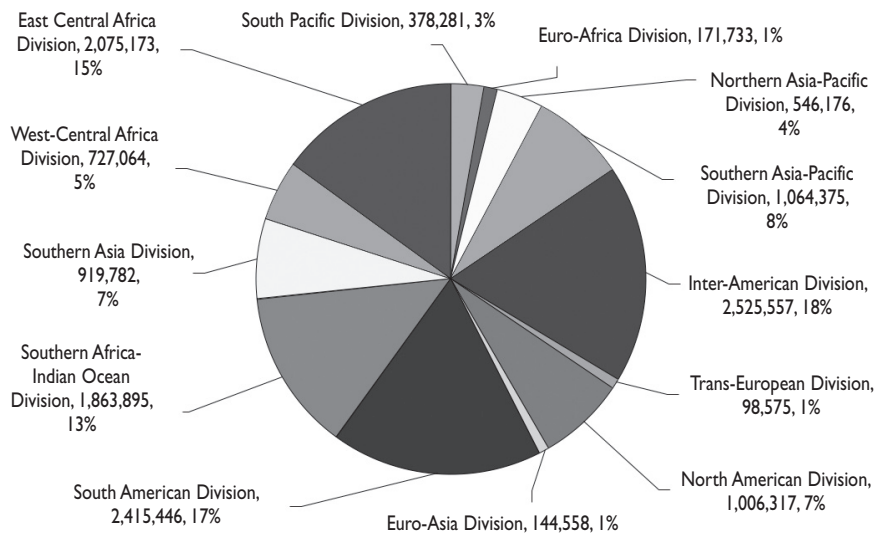
Chart 3 lists the accessions by division for the quinquennium and also for 2004, while Chart 4 notes the base divisions where those newest Seventh-day Adventists live. Expressed on a scale of 100, we can see that 38 of our newest members live in Latin America and 34 live within the African divisions. Twelve live in Southern Asia, six in Southern Asia-Pacific, about four in North America, and the remainder live in the Euro-Africa, Euro-Asia, Northern Asia-Pacific, South Pacific, and Trans-European divisions. The

Chart 1: Average Daily Accessions 1954-2004

Years	Theme	Average Daily Baptisms
1950-1954	Double the Membership	213
1955-1959	no specific theme	232
1960-1964	no specific theme	295
1965-1969	Revival, Reform, Evangelism	397
1970-1974	Revival, Reform, Evangelism	528
1975-1979	Revival, Reform, Evangelism	674
1980-1984	One-Thousand-a-Day for 1000 days*	927
1985-1989	Harvest '90	1,347
1990-1994	Global Strategy/Mission	1,678
1995-1999	Global Strategy/Mission	2,209
2000-2004	Global Strategy/Mission	2,765
2004	Global Strategy/Mission	2,933

* begun mid-1982

Chart 2: 2004 Division Membership



location of our newest members surely emphasizes the worldwide nature of the gospel we proclaim.

World population to member ratios

Charts 5 and 6 illustrate Seventh-day Adventist members as a proportion of the population within each division and also selected countries. We notice that the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division maintains an amazing ratio of one Seventh-day Adventist to 79 in the population, while a much more

challenging ratio of 1:5,922 confronts the Trans-European Division. At the end of 2004, there was one Seventh-day Adventist worldwide for every 459 persons dwelling on our planet. Projections suggest that by 2114 there could be one Seventh-day Adventist for every 300 on our planet and that the church could have a baptized membership of almost 24 million.

Jamaica, Rwanda, Zambia, Papua New Guinea, and Haiti have the highest ratios for countries having more than 100,000 Adventist members. A 1 to 13 ratio for Jamaica sets the pace while such countries as Ethiopia, Nigeria, Indonesia, India, and China exhibit more challenging ratios. The 1 to 4,027 ratio for China suggests an almost overwhelming challenge to Seventh-day Adventist mission.

Chart 3: Accessions by Divisions 2000-2004 and 2004

Division	2000-2004 Accessions	2004 Accessions
East-Central Africa	833,828	179,614
Euro-Africa	26,519	5,141
Euro-Asia	62,384	8,756
Inter-American	843,593	157,635
North American	184,788	36,887
Northern Asia-Pacific	90,981	19,741
South American	1,089,331	217,586
South Pacific	70,042	17,135
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean	684,845	185,683
Southern Asia	604,739	133,074
Southern Asia-Pacific	318,271	59,811
Trans-European	19,900	3,019
West-Central Africa	219,936	47,053
World	5,049,157	1,071,135

The quinquennium of five million gains and 1.4 million losses

Although more than five million new believers joined our community during the past quinquennium, more than 1.4 million left our church family.

The bottom line for the world church this quinquennium is that for every 100 accessions, more than 35 decided to leave. That is considerably more than the 24 who left for every 100 added during the previous quinquennium. It means that our net growth (when deaths are also taken into account) was only 1,641 daily with a resultant average annual growth rate of 4.9 percent, the lowest since the 1960 to 1964 period. Mitigating circumstances are relevant, however.

A subtitle to this quinquennium might be “The quinquennium of church membership audits.” During the past five years, a majority of the world divisions have undertaken the painful responsibility of church membership audits. The resulting careful look at local church membership records has shown a decrease in the verifiable baptized church membership of more than 800,000 during the past five years. An average annual growth rate of 4.9 percent during this quinquennium, despite the audits, suggests that the Seventh-day Adventist

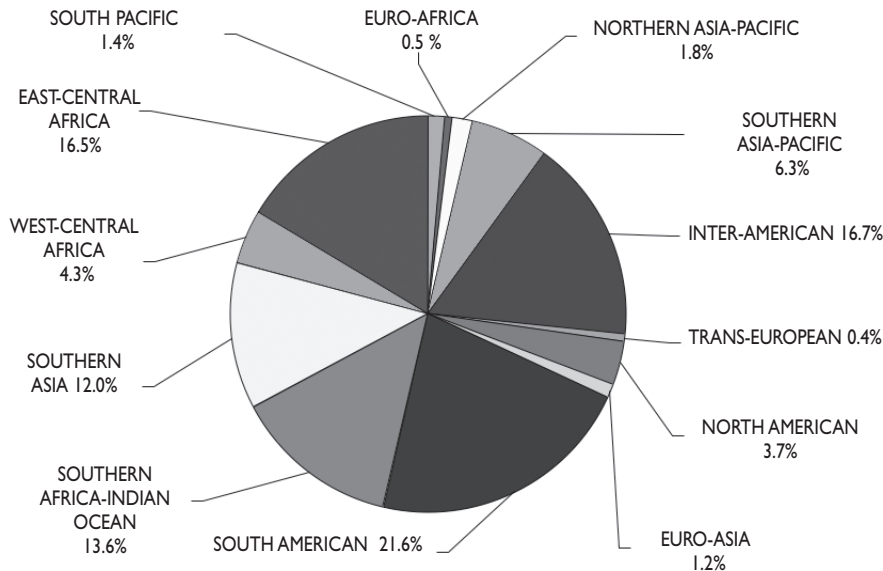
Attention, Adventist Professionals

If you hold a degree in any field and have an email address, we encourage you to join the Adventist Professionals’ Network (APN). Sponsored by the Adventist Church, this global electronic registry assists participant institutions and agencies in locating consultants with expertise, volunteers for mission assignments, and candidates for positions in teaching, administration, or research. Enter your professional information directly in the APN website:

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Encourage other Adventist professionals to register!

Chart 4: 2000-2004 Division Accession Distribution



Church is poised for a period of major growth in the near future now that our membership rolls are more accurately reflected.

New categories in tithes and offerings

At the 1958 Cleveland General Conference session, statistical secretary Henry Klaser rejoiced that Seventh-day Adventists had finally

Chart 5: Ratios Within Divisions, 2003

Population per SDA Member	Division
79	Southern Africa-Indian Ocean
87	South Pacific
104	Inter-American
120	East-Central Africa
126	South American
326	North American
420	West-Central Africa
610	Southern Asia-Pacific
1,392	Southern Asia
1,944	Euro-Asia
2,918	Northern Asia-Pacific
3,331	Euro-Africa
5,922	Trans-European

entered the billion-dollar category. By totaling the tithes, foreign mission offerings, Sabbath school offerings, Ingathering, home mission offerings, offerings for Faith for Today and Voice of Prophecy, and all local church funds and expense offerings *from 1863 to 1957 (94 years)*, he reported an amount of \$1,075,095,762 dollars. Compare that to the most recent reporting year of this quinquennium. The North American Division alone surpassed Klaser's 94-year total by receiving in 2004 tithes and offerings of \$1,192,300,000. Indeed, during this past quinquennium the worldwide receipt of tithes and offerings amounted to \$9,023,988,491. That means that on the average, every day during this quinquennium, Adventist members contributed \$4,941,267 to spread the gospel message. *In any one day of this last quinquennium*, on the average, our members contributed more than that received by the church in its initial 34 years (from 1863 to 1896).

As we contemplate our mission heritage for the past half-century, what is striking is not only the membership

Chart 6: Selected Country Ratios

(For countries with over 100,000 members)

Lowest Ratios	Country
13	Jamaica
23	Rwanda
25	Zambia
26	Papua New Guinea
28	Haiti
More Challenging Ratios	
546	Ethiopia
615	Nigeria
1,082	Indonesia
1,362	India
4,027	China

and financial growth. We have also advanced in other areas: in churches built, in health and educational ministry, in community advances, in developmental and relief work. We have opened up new avenues of witness: various forms of television ministry beginning with Faith for Today, airplane evangelism, Five-Day Plan evangelism, open-heart team evangelism, medical mission launches, orphanages, HIV/AIDS prevention, and other innovative means of alleviating the suffering of the world while pointing toward a perfect kingdom of the future. And as we develop the forward-moving tools of the future, we recognize that we are the inheritors of the blessings that God has poured upon our predecessors and continues to give for the advancement of His kingdom.

Bert Haloviak is Director of the Office of Archives and Statistics at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

Screening the screen: Media literacy and the Christian

by Delyse Steyn

Living with the media and not becoming a victim to their hidden devices is a daily battle and a continuing struggle.

Who am I? Where do I live? What is my relationship to those around me and to the environment in which I live? What is reality? How do we define our values, our ideas, and our concerns? How must we relate to one another? What can we expect from tomorrow or the day after or the day...?

These are profound questions that face human life in today's world of technology. Time was when a person could turn to philosophy or religion for an answer. But today, with the mass media turning the world into a global village, we have become creatures shaped by the media—television, film, internet, radio, and so on. The mass media provide the content from which we develop our sense of self, the nature of our relationships, our view of the world, of us and them, our ideas and ideologies, and our deepest values and concerns. Without mass media, we feel a sense of lostness: We are often unaware of what is real and what is reality. We have allowed the media to educate us as to how we should behave, what to think, feel, fear, believe, and desire. The cartoon character Bart Simpson is right in his remark to his father, "It's just hard not to listen to TV—it's spent so much more time raising us than you have!"

But that need not be so. What the mass media, particularly the TV and cinema, offer to us is a pseudo-reality, an increasing isolation and loneliness, and a breakdown of relationships that raise serious questions about the use-

fulness of technological advances. Can we think more clearly? Can we see, hear, and feel more intensely? Have we been duped and doped? Even more frighteningly, what has happened to truth in the midst of the ideologies and myths that permeate the soaps, sitcoms, news reports, and films that are part of our daily lives?

Owners of this mesmerizing technology have the power to export knowledge as a commodity and monopolize the dissemination of ideas. What we watch must therefore be prefaced with "how" we watch. As Neil Postman says, our culture is where we amuse ourselves to death. Style has replaced substance, violence marks the major share of entertainment, human relationships have been commodified and trivialized. Consequently, Postman suggests, technology drives us without analysis or thought.¹ Indeed, we should be able to talk back to our television sets. Perhaps such questioning may break the spell arising out of the mesmerizing power hidden in modern media.² So what are the questions that need answers in order to debunk the media myths?

First of all, we need to understand that there is an ongoing conflict between the values of traditional social institutions such as the home, the church, and the school and those represented in the hyper-reality of the media, resulting in social schizophrenia. One way to approach the problem is to prepare a list of "do's" and "don'ts" with regard to media and prepare some guidelines as to what movie or TV program to watch. But such an approach is too simplistic and does not recognize the powerful and intrusive socializing influence of the media.

There is another more significant approach: to fortify ourselves with a media literacy grounded on biblical principles. This demands thoughtful and prayerful study leading to a con-

struction of a worldview that will help in the wise choice of media.

Basic assumptions

At the base of such a worldview is the fundamental assumption that God exists and that He has revealed to us what is good and what is evil. Between the two, God expects us to choose wisely. The freedom to choose implies not only that we are rational beings, but also that we are expected to be responsible beings. Rationality and responsibility, rooted in an unshakable faith in God, provide us a certain discernment and wisdom with which we can approach the options that the media poses. With that as a given, we need not find any tension with the church's stance on what is acceptable and what is not.

A second basic assumption is the context in which we are to make choices out of the varied menu of the media. Jesus expressed this context thus: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:15-18, NIV).

Fischer points out that the world in which Jesus wants us to live and work is the world we find ourselves in—here and now. We are stewards of this world, and as such we have a responsibility.³

But stewardship does not mean just taking care of the planet's physical resources. It includes a responsible relationship to our leisure time and to our cultural landscape. This means that we understand the media and its culture in their entirety—their potential artfulness and their pervasive value messages. With such an understanding, we will approach, for example, the television for its pleasure and enjoyment, but will do so with a critical participation. This is necessary in view

of the typical evening prime-time diet, which Duncan aptly describes:

“The screen flashes close-ups of mostly good-looking people fondling each other, punching each other out or laughing their heads off. Cut to car chases in underground parking lots, set to the sound of tires squealing and fenders bashing. Cut to newscasts with short snatches of segments on disasters, murders and wars—mixed with chatter from politicians who reassure us that all will be well. Cut to high-jolts-per-minute commercials featuring persuasive pitches for instant beauty, and relief from constipation, and warning not to leave home without a certain plastic card that offers limitless pleasures. This supermarket of the soul can be truly mind-boggling.”⁴

Hence the need for media literacy. Media literacy is “the ability to sift through and analyze the messages that inform, entertain, and sell to us every day.”⁵ Media literacy involves critical inquiry into what makes the media—what is there, what is not there, their motives, money, ownership, and values, and how these factors influence the content. What is the message media are trying to convey to us? From where do these messages originate? What are the strategies employed to convey the message?

The following outline can provide a framework for using a semiotic approach (that is, analyzing the signs and symbols) to visuals/texts (cartoons, advertisements, photos, etc.). They can be used to discover the levels of meaning, namely, the denotation, connotation, and values, as well as the ideas or ideology of the communicator:

1. Isolate and analyze important signs in the text.

- What are the important signifiers?
- What do they signify?
- Is there a system that unifies them?
- What codes can be found (e.g. symbols of status, colors, music, composition)?

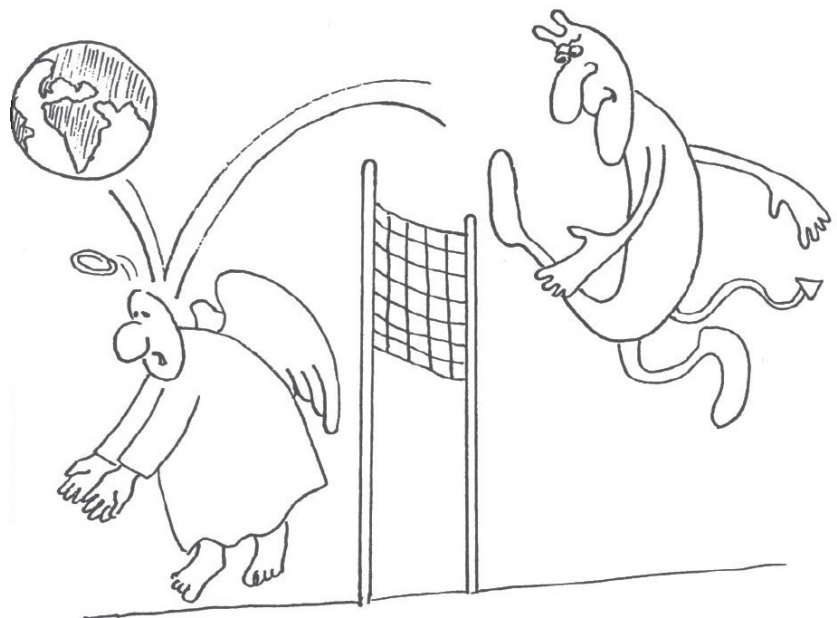
- Are ideological or sociological issues being addressed?
 - How are they conveyed or hinted at?
2. Identify the central structure, theme, or model of the text.
- What forces are in opposition?
 - What forces are teamed with one another?
 - Do the oppositions or teams have psychological or sociological meanings? What are they?
3. What is the narrative structure of the text?
- How does the sequential arrangement of the events affect meaning? What changes in meaning would result if they were altered?
 - Are there any formulaic aspects to the text?
4. Does the medium being used affect the text? How?
- Use of shots, camera angles, editing, dissolves, etc.
 - Use of lighting, color, music, sound, special effects, etc.
 - Paper quality, typefaces, graphics, colors, etc.
 - How do the speaker’s words, gestures, and facial expressions affect meaning?

5. How does the application of semiotic theory alter the original meaning that you might have ascribed to the text?

Try this out

Use the questions above to unpack the meaning of the message of the cartoon below. The signifier (the supplied cartoon) is made up of signs. A sign is a representation of something; it has a referent. The “devil” is a sign and so is the “angel.” The “world” is a sign. All of these signs make up the signifier, which is a representation, i.e., a message that has a meaning that the communicator wants to communicate. The signified is the meaning and in some cases the reality, i.e., a picture of a dog probably represents some actual dog, etc. There is therefore a “gap” (between the signifier and what is signified) that the recipient of a message has to bridge from his or her experience, etc.

The cartoon illustrates the ideological struggle, the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Take the Bible and explore these themes, and then apply them to life in the context of a Christian worldview. Use the text below as a starting point. You will be



amazed at how contemporary, how relevant the Bible is.

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:11-18, NIV).

I have used such analysis in media literacy classes, and student’s comments varied: “I’m not going to allow myself to be insulted again.” “I did not know that there are such meaningful programs!” “Why always so late at night!” “May I borrow that tape so that I can show my friend?” “This course caused me to realize that I am a person in my own right and that I must be on the look-out for those who wish to take this away and make me a puppet.” “I did not know that the mass media could have such a negative influence on those that are unsuspecting.”

Not only did the students become selective, but they also testified to the influence that discussions about truth, reality, and beauty in relation to the media, had on their Christian experience. One student remarked that all young people want to be different and that he had discovered that the only

authentic way to be really different from the masses is to be a Christian.

Paul expresses this concern in Romans 12:1-3, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (NIV).

A daily battle

Living with the media and not becoming a victim to their hidden devices is a daily battle. Media shapes our culture. It affects our thinking, our identity, and can lead us away from God. It comes in various forms and shapes: in what we see, in the literature we read, in the economics and industries that affect our daily life, in the public opinion and politics that we are called upon to participate in. It plays a significant psychological role in how we work, worship, serve, and lead our family lives. It involves design, fashion, aesthetics, and philosophy of who we are and the nature of reality and truth.

The challenge of its dialectics and its message is no different today than it was in Paul’s time, and we will do well to ponder with the apostle: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.... For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Corinthians 1:20-22, 25, NIV).

Ellen White too emphasizes this continual process of weighing what we see, read, and hear by a careful exercise of the power of choice God has given. “Every human being,” she wrote, “cre-

ated in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men and women in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train young people to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other people’s thought.”⁶

We cannot confront the dangers that arise from the media by an attitude of quiet acceptance, conformism, and sacrifice of our individuality. Christian media literacy requires that we be aware of and confront with moral and spiritual rectitude the hidden dangers of the media—the dangers that employ high-tech tools and anthropocentric ideals to destroy the distinction between right and wrong, and in the process destroy the image of God in the individual at the altar of so-called societal entertainment. The ideology that means can justify ends cannot be allowed to have its unbridled say when it comes to examining the media and its effect on us.

Only thus can we screen the screen—that is to say, withstand the bewitching power of the media and be free to choose what is right and good.

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PROFILES



She is young. She is beautiful. And she is a gifted musician. Thousands of Adventists stood entranced as she played her violin for two lunch-hour concerts at the General Conference Session in St. Louis. Eva-Charlotte Roslin is Sweden's youngest qualified female conductor. She is also an accomplished violinist, with a master's degree in the field. In addition, she serves as the music director for the Swedish Union of Seventh-day Adventists.

Eva-Charlotte Roslin

Dialogue with an Adventist conductor from Sweden

Eva-Charlotte was born in the small Swedish town of Grenna. Although she has just one younger brother, she feels she grew up in a large family surrounded with love. "I have five cousins of my own age," says Eva-Charlotte. "As we grew up in Grenna, we lived near each other, went to the same school, worshipped in the same church with our parents, and did many things together. We had lots of fun. There was always something going on." Such an atmosphere gave Eva a sense of security and a feeling that she could grow up and achieve her goals in life. At 15 she left the little town to follow her dream of becoming a conductor. Her immediate and extended family provided the support she needed. "With that and God's grace," says Eva-Charlotte, "I completed a B.A. in conducting and went on to complete the master's degree in violin."

Eva recently released two compact disks: one to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Adventist Church in Sweden, and another with her Grenna family and friends, singing some of their favorite Christmas songs.

Dialogue interviewed her during a break in her busy program.

■ *Do you come from a family talented in music?*

You can say that music is in my genes. My maternal grandfather's grandfather was a famous folk musician or fiddler in Dalarna. We even have a popular folk song named after him— *Carl Herman and I*—the Carl Herman being my great, great, great grandfather. My parents are interested in music, both sing in a local choir, and Mom plays the piano, but that is about all.

■ *How did you become interested in music?*

It all started when I was four. Tamira Johansson, one of my friends from church, wanted to learn the violin using the Suzuki method. I have no idea why she decided that she was going to learn using that method, but soon her mother discovered that the only way was to have a teacher come from a near-by town and teach a group. As a result, all the children from church met at my uncle's home for violin lessons.

The Suzuki method teaches students first to play by experimenting with the instrument, listening to the teacher and to tapes, and playing by ear. It is only later that you learn the theory and begin to read music.

My mother is highly motivated and believes that if something is worth doing it is worth doing well. She took time to spend an hour a day with me to help me practice my violin. At the same time I began to learn the piano, and once again mother was there by my side.

■ *When did you decide you wanted to be a conductor?*

When I was nine I wrote a school essay, "When I grow up I want to be a conductor." That was my dream, but I also dreamt of being an architect or a lawyer. The turning point came when I was eleven—something clicked and I no longer needed my mother's encouragement to practice. I was sufficiently motivated to practice a minimum of two hours a day by myself. I could see the rewards and became fully focused on music.

At 14 I began to take lessons from a

Hungarian professor in Örebro. Again my mother supported me by driving the 340 km round-trip every Sunday. Before this teacher would accept me as a pupil, he wanted my promise that I would apply to music college. As a result, when I finished junior high school I applied to music college in Gothenburg and Stockholm, even though I was three years too young and had not yet completed high school. To my delight, I was accepted in both places and as a 15-year-old started attending the Royal University College of Music in Stockholm.

■ *How did you qualify to be a conductor?*

I spent seven years at the Royal University College of Music: four years taking a master's in violin and three years taking my B.A. in conducting. They were challenging years. There were not enough practice rooms at the school, so I used to get up at 5:15 every day to be at the college by 7:00 when it opened. Between 1999 and 2002 I spent the summers in St. Petersburg taking conducting classes, and then in 2002 I spent six months studying conducting in Vienna.

■ *Do you travel much?*

My study involved travel to Vienna and St. Petersburg. In addition, I traveled to many places in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. I also spent time in Belgrade and Montenegro, in the former Yugoslavia, as part of the World Peace Orchestra. There we played with musicians from all sides of the conflict.

I also lead a string quartet, which I formed with three friends—The Grand Quartet. It got its name because we formed it initially when we worked as house musicians at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm as a way of supplementing our income while we studied. When we visited Belgrade we were invited to perform on television.

A few months ago, I attended the General Conference Session in St.

Louis where I played in the orchestra, performed at two of the lunchtime concerts and also in the main auditorium. It was a privilege to be able to play with so many other Adventists and contribute to the worship.

■ *What are the greatest challenges you face in your work?*

A conductor must get the whole orchestra to buy into his or her idea of how a particular composition should be played. To meld the musicians into a cohesive group where each one feels valued for their contribution, but also recognize that they are interdependent—that's the challenge. Often it is hard work, but when you see the result at the end of a performance it is worth all the effort.

I measure the success of any performance by whether we were able to make the public lose themselves in the music. To forget the outside world and just live for the performance.

■ *Do you have any opportunities to witness in your work?*

Everyone has opportunities to witness all the time. The question is whether we are open to grasp those opportunities. Generally, conductors are viewed as arrogant people and difficult to get along with. By not living up to the stereotype and by being sympathetic and open I have many chances of witnessing to people I work with.

■ *You conduct a very special choir. Can you say something about it?*

The Grenna Singers is celebrating its 25th anniversary. I have been involved in this musical group from the start, from the time I was old enough to sing. Essentially, it is made up of my extended family. It was formed to sing at evangelistic meetings and other church events. There are three generations of singers, and the few who are not relatives of our family members who sing are members of the church family in Grenna. I have known them

all my life and they feel like family. We have just recorded our first compact disk, *The Joy of Christmas*. I have spent the last few weeks closeted in the editing studio working on this project, and the disk will soon be ready for release. We also have a series of concerts planned to run up to Christmas. This is a tangible way to witness and at the same time seek support for ADRA.

■ *Who are your role models?*

My earliest role model was my mother. Without her encouragement and dedication I would not be where I am today. The other is Herbert Blomstedt. As an Adventist conductor, he has been an inspiration, proving that it is possible to be an Adventist and a world renowned conductor. He has also taken an interest in me personally, inviting me to visit him in Switzerland and allowing me to sit in on some of his rehearsals with the Leipzig Orchestra.

■ *What would you like to say to Dialogue readers?*

My motto is "You become what you think!" I believe in miracles. I would encourage all *Dialogue* readers to think big, reach for the skies, and be open to let God use you. Then you will see miracles in your life and in the lives of those around you.

Interview by Audrey Andersson

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PROFILES



Not many Seventh-day Adventists are addressed as His Excellency. Ken D. Bilima is an exception because of his appointment in 2003 as the ambassador of Malawi to Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Mr. Bilima had his collegiate training at Solusi University and later at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, where he was one of the first graduates.

He always considered himself a pursuer of excellence in education. This pursuit took him to the Philippines, where he obtained a master's degree in Education and English. Upon returning from the Philippines, Prof. Bilima served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a teacher, school administrator, and as the Malawi Union Education Director.

His administrative talents came to the attention of the government of Malawi, and in 2003 he was appointed as the Deputy High Commissioner of Malawi in Nairobi, Kenya.

While he is in town, Mr. Bilima attends the Lavington Seventh-day Adventist Church and is active in various ministries. He and his wife have two young children.

Ken D. Bilima

Dialogue with an Adventist diplomat from Malawi

■ *Mr. Deputy High Commissioner, can you tell the readers of Dialogue a little about your family background?*

I was born in a family of nine children. Coming from a low economic background, my parents had to really struggle to care for us and educate us. They were able to pay for my tuition only up to the last class of elementary school. From the first year I joined the secondary school, I was on my own, and worked hard to find my tuition. One job I learned to do, which really shaped my determination, is literature evangelism. I can proudly say that God helped me to be self-supporting, and was with me as a literature evangelist all the way through my educational career up to graduate school.

■ *We will return to that later. Can you comment about the schools and colleges you have attended and the kind of education you have received?*

My elementary education began in a small school in my village. After two years there, I moved to Lunjika Adventist School where I completed the elementary level, and the first two years of secondary education. Then I moved to Malamulo Adventist School where I completed secondary school. Then began the exciting journey of college education at Solusi College (now Solusi University) in Zimbabwe. Armed with a diploma in theology from there, I moved to the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton. In 1982 I completed my bachelor's degree with two majors, in English and Religion. But I was not satisfied. Education was my constant pursuit. So I went to Philippine Union College (now Adventist University of the Philippines) where I did a master's

degree in English and Education.

■ *How did you get appointed to diplomatic service?*

This appointment took me by surprise. I was working for the Adventist Church in Malawi as Union education director for ten years. During that time I was able to interact with several high ranking government personnel, including the president of the country on official church matters. When the president learned that I had not been reappointed during the church elections, he called for me and said, "I have a job for you in Nairobi. Please give me your curriculum vitae." At that time, I did not know what kind of job it was until I received a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asking me to appear before parliament. There I received my appointment to be Deputy High Commissioner located in Kenya.

■ *Did your education in Adventist schools prepare you in any way for this kind of service?*

Definitely. You see, Adventist education emphasizes not just one area of study. It is wholistic in its philosophy and nature, and it prepares young people for a wide arena of service. It trains one to meet varied challenges of life and work. As I studied theology, I was exposed to other areas like public speaking, counseling, and community service. When I was doing English I read a lot of literature, including foreign authors that opened for me other vistas. Adventist education really broadens one's horizons, lifts one's attitudes, and strengthens character.

■ *As Deputy High Commissioner, what*

are your responsibilities?

My primary responsibility is to deputize the High Commissioner in representing the Malawi president and the interests of Malawi in the countries in which we serve. Whenever the High Commissioner is not around, I step in and carry out all the functions assigned to him. However, I do have specific responsibilities which include working as a defense attaché, administrative officer, political advisor (which means I must read all the newspapers and advise my president accordingly), trade attaché, consular officer, head of chancery, and head of accounts.

■ *How do you manage all these responsibilities?*

When you have a lot of responsibilities, you tend to work harder to accomplish all of them. I am used to working hard from my early life of struggle.

■ *Being a Seventh-day Adventist, have you felt any special advantage in approaching your assignment?*

I have read and heard people say that we need Daniels in the present age. Being an Adventist has given me an opportunity to be a Daniel in my own context. I get to interact with several government leaders, including heads of state. It is only when one is in the system that one is able to help.

■ *Many equate diplomatic service with politics. Any comment?*

I do not know if the statement is entirely right. Being a diplomat, of course, is a political appointment, but in a strict sense a diplomat is not in politics. We spend most of the time negotiating treaties such as trade agreements and dealing with non-political, inter-governmental issues between countries. Mostly diplomatic service has to do with negotiation. We are continually negotiating issues such as ways in which Malawi benefit from trade with Kenya and vice versa. So it is not politics per se but using negotiating skills and concluding deals effectively.

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■ *I notice that you are in church every Sabbath and actively participate in lesson study as well as other activities of the church. How do you manage to do this and how is your faith affected by your current position?*

My work does not negatively impact my faith, but as in many cases, work such as I do challenges the practice of my faith. For example, the strict observance of the Sabbath. There are times when one is summoned to meet a governmental officer passing through on Sabbath at 6:45 a.m., or to assist some stranded person at the airport. Even in such instances I would still find time to worship my God. In cases where work is planned in advance, I have had no problem. One has to strike a balance and plan assignments that would not compromise one's faith.

■ *Do you find enough time to spend with your family?*

Yes, I do. In fact I have more time for my family now than when I was working as education director, when I would sometimes spend up to three weeks out in the field. Now I have time to take my family in some of my trips, or just be together most of the evenings.

■ *What advice would you give to young Adventists, wishing to take up diplomatic or government service?*

One must be ready to serve one's country, when called upon. Of course, young people should be aware of the challenges involved in such assignments. They need to know how to strike a balance and ensure value priorities. Diplomatic or government service is a good career that exposes you to significant leaders and authorities. Being there, like Daniel, opens up opportunities for faithful service and witness.

■ *May be we can revisit your experience as a literature evangelist. Beyond making you support yourself while in school and*

college, have you gained anything from this work track?

When selling books you need to have the negotiating ability to convince your client to buy the books. That is very critical in diplomacy as well. You must be able to negotiate, persuade, and conclude deals. So I think my canvassing work helped me. You have to be prepared to approach anybody in high places, even in government, to sell a book; otherwise you cannot be a successful colporteur. The same is true with diplomacy.

■ *Any counsel you can give to young people who are struggling to pay for their education?*

Earning while you learn is a very valuable experience. Working your way through school not only gets you the needed financial support, but also helps you develop skills in leadership, independence, persuasion—all necessary to succeed in life. So if you don't have ready resources for your education, don't get discouraged. Press on. Use your hands. Use your head. Get a job, even a part-time job. Or join the church's literature evangelism program. You'll never regret the fact that you earned your way through college and achieved your goals under the blessing of God.

Interview by Hudson E. Kibuuka

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ACTION REPORT



A powerful influence for good

by Heron Santana

Turn around and take a look. Flip on the TV, and see what's there. Browse through a magazine in the supermarket checkout, what do you see? Tune in your car radio, and is it music that you hear? We live, hear, see, study, and work in a culture that is worldly, materialistic, consumer-oriented, drug-dominated, and everything that is not supportive of a Christian lifestyle. In the midst of such an alien world, how can we live a life of Christian integrity?

The question was the focus of the congress of Adventist university students held April 21-24, 2005, on the campus of Adventist University of Bahia, Brazil, with 360 participants.

During the meeting, several academic and religious specialists offered a Christian analysis and critique of these influences. The main speaker, Erton Kohler—Youth Department director for the South American

Division—spoke about the group pressures that youth and young adults experience in their lives. He counseled the participants to exert “a group pressure for good,” behaving in a way that the Christian values will be seen and felt wherever they are. “When we see people around us that speak evil and behave immorally, we cannot remain silent or hide ourselves.”

Ozeas Caldas Moura, the director of the theological seminary of the host institution, spoke about sexuality. Noting that this is a subject that the mass media exploit and debase, he invited the students to review together with him the Song of Solomon and to comprehend the biblical perspective on sexual principles and Christian behavior.

Popular music, another cultural manifestation impacted by mass communications, was addressed by Jean do Ouro, dean of the school of music at

the university. Antonio Brito, youth director for the Northeast Brazil Union, outlined 10 principles that can turn Adventist university students into a positive influence. He stated that reflective Bible study and intercessory prayer can strengthen our influence for good. “Don't be too quick to label others,” he counseled. “Show respect and manifest Christian love, because all human beings have God-given value.”

A moving feature of the program was the testimony given by Helder Carvalho. Although not an Adventist, he had been contracted to teach a course at Adventist University of Bahia, substituting for a teacher on leave. After fulfilling the assignment, he was invited to teach another course on campus, which he accepted with pleasure. The Christian influence of faculty members and students led him to study the Bible with one of his colleagues. And during the congress, he publicly stated that he wanted to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church through baptism. The testimony brought tears to many in the audience.

As the congress came to an end, the positive evaluation given by the participants made it evident that the organizers had chosen a relevant topic and had invited qualified speakers. Some of the students had traveled great distances to attend the meeting. A group of 50 participants who are members of an Adventist student association in the city of Paraiba, covered the longest distance. They expressed their satisfaction for the meeting and stated that the event had fostered a closer cooperation between students and professors in being an influence for good on the university campus.

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“Committed minds – Ready hearts”

by Benjamin Carballo and Arturo King

More than 500 Adventist participants from all regions of Mexico converged on beautiful Cancun, on the Yucatan Peninsula, for the National Congress of Adventist University Students and Professionals. They came by car, bus, and plane. The enthusiasm was high. Co-sponsored by the South and North Mexican unions, the meeting was held December 19-22, 2004, at a spacious hotel in this world-famous resort city on the Caribbean Sea.

The overall theme of the congress was “Committed minds – Ready hearts.” The three featured lecturers were Raul Esperante (a researcher from the Geoscience Research Institute), Pedro Morales (a specialist in personal development from Colombia), and Humberto M. Rasi (chief editor of *Dialogue*). Their expositions and the lively discussions that followed centered around the key role that Adventist students and professionals play as Christ’ ambassadors on the

public university campus and in their workplace.

In addition to the devotional messages and the high-quality music, the university students were surveyed regarding two important issues that affect their life and witness. The key questions and the four top answers provided by the groups were as follows:

Question 1: *What are the main challenges that you face as an Adventist student in a public university?*

- Study activities and examinations scheduled on Sabbath.
- The negative influences of non-believing friends on our social relationships, habits, and lifestyle.
- The secular worldview and philosophies assumed and promoted in the vast majority of the lectures and textbooks.
- The loneliness, isolation, and at times hostility that we experience as we try to live out our Christian beliefs and principles.

Question 2: *How can the Adventist Church, as an organization, support you as students, and engage you in our shared gospel mission?*

- Provide us with more materials and training on how to explain our beliefs and attract others to Christ.
- Organize regular, well-planned meetings like this congress that will offer instruction, encouragement, and social interaction, with travel assistance.
- Help us to establish and maintain viable Adventist student associations where the number of students warrants it, providing guidance and support.
- Assist us, as we approach graduation, in locating opportunities for employment in Adventist institutions and organizations where our talents and degrees may be needed and useful.

During the closing ceremonies, the participants were invited to commit their minds to Christ and to share His love with their friends and colleagues.

Benjamin Carballo and Arturo King serve, respectively, as directors of the Youth Departments and AMiCUS coordinators in the South and North Mexican Unions. Their email address: bcvebe@hotmail.com and lagk64@hotmail.com.



Send us your group’s report

Leaders of Adventist university student associations are invited to send a brief report of their group’s activities and one or two digital photos for publication in *Dialogue*. Include all relevant information about the student group, describe its main activities, challenges, and plans, and list the name, position, and email address of the report’s author. Send them to Humberto M. Rasi (h.rasi@adelphia.net) and to Esther Rodriguez (rodrigueze@gc.adventist.org). Thank you!

LOGOS

Rumors of things unseen

The scientific juggernaut continues to unveil a hidden infrastructure of nature.

by Regis Nicoll

“The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.”

—Obi-wan Kenobi

In 1977, George Lucas captured the imagination of millions with his epic-adventure, *Star Wars*. Mystic luminaries, anthropomorphic androids, and groundbreaking special effects served to set this movie apart in the sci-fi genre. But what left the most lasting impression in the minds of many viewers was the light saber brandished by Luke Skywalker in his mortal contests with Darth Vader. Those mythic conflicts fascinated audiences with the rumor of an invisible Force of staggering potential—a source of energy that permeated the entire cosmos, and yet could be called upon by common folk to fend off the forces of evil.

It all proved to be a perfect hook for audiences brought up in the dawning age of high technology and Western mysticism. But could Lucas and company have communicated more truth in their high-tech blockbuster than they may have realized? We'll see.

*“Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).**

Over 20 years after the initial *Star Wars* episode, the astrophysics community stumbled on a startling revelation. Ever since 1929, when Edwin Hubble detected the redshift of light emitted from distant stars, the outward expansion of the universe had been a well-established fact. But what stunned researchers in the late 1990s were the redshift measurements of supernovae

revealing that the universe is not only expanding, but accelerating! That meant that galaxies and stars are receding from each other at an ever-increasing rate. Scrambling to identify the source of this phenomenon, physicists dubbed it “dark energy” because of its mysterious, unseen nature.

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Subsequent measurements revealed that this invisible energy suffusing the cosmos accounts for an amazing 70 percent of all the stuff in the universe. If you add to that all of the dark matter in the universe—matter that is not visible—then dark “stuff” makes up 95 percent of the known cosmos. The unexpected appearance of dark energy, and its implications for understanding the universe, has led prominent physicists like Lawrence Krauss, Ed Witten, and Steven Weinberg to call this the biggest question in all of physics. But why so?

“The universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3.)

Ask almost anyone what resides in the dark vacuum of space, and they will likely reply, “Nothing, of course!” Likewise, in the scientific community it was long believed that with the exception of sparse collections of galaxies, stars, planets, and interstellar dust and gas, the vast expanse of space was empty—a vacuous wasteland devoid of matter and energy. However, with the

advent of quantum theory and Albert Einstein’s theory of gravity (general relativity), scientists began to realize that space is not a vast region of emptiness but—when included with time—a four-dimensional fabric of the visible universe.

“He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent” (Psalm 104:2).

These revolutionary insights revealed that, at the subatomic scale, space-time is a gossamer-like structure, interwoven with wildly undulating threads of quantum energy in which tiny, exotic particles are continuously popping into and out of existence. At large scales, the movements of galaxies and stars create gravitational waves that ripple throughout the cosmic fabric according to Einstein’s formulation of general relativity. These developments all worked to reshape the long-held notion of space as an inert void, to the recognition of space as a tumultuous ocean of activity. But of what, exactly, did these cosmic waves consist?

“Do not I fill the heaven and earth?” declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:24).

It is one of science’s great ironies that Einstein modified his original theory of general relativity by including a small repulsive force to counteract the attractive force of gravity. Einstein felt this modification necessary because, over large scales, the inward pull of gravity would lead to the eventual collapse of the universe and, as he and everyone else “knew,” the universe was eternal and unchanging. But with the discoveries of stellar redshifts, universe expansion, and the “Big Bang,” Einstein had to retract his modification and, in doing so, called it his “biggest blunder.” But this “blunder” would re-emerge some 70 years later to become a leading contender for dark energy—the strange force behind cosmic expansion.

“He who created the heavens and

stretched them out ... gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it" (Isaiah 42:5).

That still left open the question of what this mysterious energy is and where it comes from. A top candidate, for many theorists, is the rolling energy of the quantum field that is thought to be inherent in the cosmos, saturating all of space. But that compounds our dilemma with even more fundamental questions: What is the origin of this perpetual source of energy? And what "engine" sustains it?

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3).

Another problem is that, according to quantum field theory, the amount of energy in one cubic centimeter of "empty" space is more than that contained in all of the matter of the universe! (I guess Vader wasn't kidding when he chided, "Don't underestimate the Force!" Talk about untapped power!) Which brings up the next question, why is the energy we observe so much less than what is available?

"His glory covered the heavens... rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden" (Habakkuk 3:3, 4).

Finally there is the "coincidence" that energy and matter are in just the right amounts for the universe to sit astride the dividing line between eternal expansion and eventual collapse. This has caused some researchers to conclude that we live in a favored place and epoch in history in which the "just right" conditions for the universe exist, and in which humans can observe and discern many of the mysteries of creation. But as physicist Brian Greene warns, "[any answer that] hinges its success on extremely precise tunings of features for which we lack fundamental explanation makes most physicists recoil."

"Why is that?" you ask. Because it implies Someone on the "outside" fiddling with the controls, which is

strictly against the "rules" of scientific materialism.

In the last days people will be "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

Over the last 300 years scientists have made tremendous strides in describing the observable phenomena of nature. But with each discovery have come new questions that have multiplied the mysteries we behold. What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that the move from description to explanation is beyond the realm of scientific inquiry alone. From the infinitesimal to the infinite, the design and structure of nature point inexorably to the wonders of things unseen.

The scientific juggernaut continues to unveil a hidden infrastructure of nature. And with each new discovery, evidence mounts for a supra-natural fabric that not only supercharges and animates the cosmos, but also holds the ultimate answers about the universe and reality itself. Dark energy is but the latest hint that there is something not quite natural about "Nature."

Speaking for many investigators unsettled by this implication, University of Chicago physicist Michael Turner remarked, "Dark energy holds the key to understanding our destiny [and] could well be the number one problem in all of physics and astronomy."

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:34).

Ever since our arrival on the set, there's been a nagging rumor going around about things unseen; and of Someone behind the stage curtain tweaking the dials. And despite our efforts to set that childish notion aside, each twist of the plot seems to lead back to the inevitable collision with that rumor.

Regis Nicoll is a freelance writer and a Wilberforce Forum Centurion. Having worked as a nuclear engineer and radiation health professional for more than 30 years, Regis serves as an elder, teacher, and men's ministry leader in the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church. He publishes a weekly commentary to stimulate thought on current issues from a Christian perspective. To be placed on this free e-mail distribution list, email him at: centurion51@aol.com.

* All Bible texts in this article are quoted from the New International Version.

For Further Reading:

The Fabric of the Cosmos, Brian Greene
A Brief History of Time, Stephen Hawking
Dark Energy and the New Cosmology, Michael S. Turner: <http://supernova.lbl.gov/~evlinder/turner.pdf>
Dark Energy and the Preposterous Universe, Sean M. Carroll: <http://pancake.uchicago.edu/~carroll/snapyellow.pdf>
Questions That Plague Physicists: A Conversation with Lawrence M. Krauss: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1178719/posts>
Scientists Ponder the Problem With Gravity: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6273955/>

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VIEWPOINT

Thinking straight in a crooked world

by Ron du Preez

The biblical lifestyle is not based on changing human thought-patterns, but on principles rooted in God's revelation.

No one can deny the close link that exists between thinking and action. Says Proverbs 23:7 (NASB): "For as he thinks within himself, so is he." Christian psychologist Gary Collins agrees: "In large measure, how we think with our minds determines how we live."¹ This recognition of the cause-effect relationship between thinking and moral living must lead us to reflect on various types of thinking that can and often do impact the manner in which Christians relate to various lifestyle concerns.

Genetic-origin hypotheses

In a 1994 article, entitled "Our Cheating Hearts," *Time* magazine noted that, according to evolutionary psychologists, "it is 'natural' for both men and women—at some times, and under some circumstances—to commit adultery." The article argued that humans are genetically predisposed or programmed to be unfaithful to a marriage partner. If this is so, then how can one be held responsible for one's actions? After all, this desire for infidelity is not really a matter of personal choice; it is really of genetic origin. Such types of genetic-origin perspectives are becoming more and more popular, justifying various behaviors that were once considered immoral.

However, "How can evolution-

ary psychologists be so sure?" *Time* answered its own question: "In part, their *faith* rests on the whole data base of evolutionary biology."² That appears to be the crucial issue—faith!

While it is indeed true that human beings are born with sinful natures, and each one of us has certain sinful tendencies and predispositions, the question is: In what or in whom do we place our "faith"? Do we put our faith in evolutionary hypotheses? Or, do we place our faith in the God of the Bible, who is willing and indeed able to make us into new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)? Do we believe in the spurious speculation that our genes determine how we live our lives? Or, do we believe in the power of the gospel to transform the one who accepts Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16)?

More and more scientists do recognize the truth that, while genes contribute to personality traits, they do not entirely determine them or dictate what we choose to do. As John Ratey, a neuropsychiatrist at Harvard University, recently put it: "Genes do not make a man gay, or violent, or fat, or a leader. Genes merely make proteins... We humans are not prisoners of our genes or our environment. We have free will."³

In brief, we are born in sin, yes; we are prone to do evil, yes; but, we have the power of choice to do that which is good; to be "overcomers" through God's Spirit (see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 21:7; etc.).

Mechanical-protection philosophy

A second approach to some human quandaries is the philosophy that

advocates mechanical protection as the best option. According to the December 2004 United Nations report on AIDS, about 40 million people are currently living with HIV/AIDS.⁴ And about 20 million have died of the disease.

In the year 2002, about 3.1 million people died of AIDS worldwide; 2.3 million of these deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. Some years before this report came out, one African country decided to promote the use of condoms and provide them to many institutions. In fact, the government urged every church, including Seventh-day Adventist congregations, to display condoms in the foyer and to distribute them to their members in a desperate bid to defeat this dreaded and deadly disease. An Adventist pastor from that country asked me, "What should I do? The government wants me to do this." In such a situation, what should Adventists do? What is the compassionate, Christ-centered, scriptural approach to this issue?

Dr. Harvy Elder of Loma Linda University, who is actively involved on the issue of AIDS, including preventive measures, notes the following case study of Uganda. Starting in 1986, nationwide education sought to change moral behavior in cooperation with the religious community, schools, and the military. These all promoted abstinence until marriage and then faithfulness within marriage. Testing and intervention methods were improved. The results were phenomenal. Sexual activity among boys 13-16 years old declined from 60 percent to 5 percent, and among girls of the same age group the drop was from 24 percent to 2 percent. Male virginity from 15-19 years of age increased from 32 percent to 55 percent, while female virginity increased from 38 percent to 45 percent. Premarital sex by men declined from 60 percent to 23 percent, while premarital sex by women declined 53 percent to 16 percent. Men with more than one sex partner

declined from 86 percent to 29 percent; and women with more than one partner from 75 percent to 7 percent.

Later, after these major declines, condoms were introduced. Thus, in the late 1990s, with increased emphasis on mechanical protection, there was decline in self-control, with increasing numbers of partners and increasing HIV rates.⁵

Similarly, since the “True Love Waits” abstinence movement arrived on the scene in the United States in 1993, “rates of teenage sexual activity, pregnancies, diseases and abortions have fallen for 12 unbroken years,” notes Erin Curry. Put simply, “young people who pledge virginity until marriage have lower rates of STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] and engage in fewer risky sexual behaviors.”⁶

Now, it may be true that some who use condoms for pre-marital or extramarital sex may be “protected” from some physical harm—from AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, etc. But this type of activity does not protect one from emotional, psychological, spiritual, and moral devastation. Anyone who is acquainted with the Bible realizes that the human is an integrated being.

As committed Adventists, we need to say to any who may be tempted to use condoms for extramarital sex: “We know that the secular world alleges that you can protect yourself mechanically through condoms when indulging in sexual promiscuity; but, remember that the body is an integrated whole. Indeed, it is classified as ‘the temple of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 6:19, NKJV). Don’t fall for the falsehoods of this fallen world. Live the biblical way.”

While it is true that HIV/AIDS can be contracted through dirty needles, blood transfusions, rape, etc., that is not the point of discussion in this article. The issue being considered here is the danger of secular thinking patterns that promote unbiblical lifestyle choices. Sadly, many innocent babies also get HIV/AIDS during birth or

breast-feeding; others may contract it through abusive relationships. All, however, need to be treated with true Christlike compassion, as children of God, and not shunned simply due to having HIV/AIDS.

G. C. Berkouwer, noted theologian, puts it this way: “The Biblical view of man, shows him to us in an impressive diversity, but...it never loses sight of the *unity* of the whole man.”⁷ Medical and social scientists have confirmed that there is an integral relationship between mind and body. Since human beings are made in the image of God, we are to reflect that image in everything we do.

Politically-correct terminology

A third attempt to escape from tough issues is to hide beneath the sinking sand of political correctness. In mid-2002 a CNN news report discussed the financial scandals involving United States companies Enron and WorldCom. When CNN reporter Wolf Blitzer called the accounting problems “fuzzy math,” the guest being interviewed immediately disagreed, saying: “It is out and out fraud!”

It is indeed interesting to observe how language has changed. No longer is promiscuity called “fornication”; it is “being sexually active.” “Prostitutes” are classified as “commercial sex workers.” When innocent civilians are “killed” during war, it is called “collateral damage.” Homosexuality, once categorized as “deviant behavior,” is simply an “alternative lifestyle.”⁸

This type of manipulation of terminology can be seen even within the Christian community, where, for example, deliberate deception is referred to as “a diversionary tactic,” an “imaginative strategy,” a “playful trick,” or “a very practical solution.” Whatever happened to the challenge to call a spade a spade? A renowned Christian writer summons us to “call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry,

and every other evil.”⁹

Isaiah 5:20 warns: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil” (NKJV). In place of the word “woe” some Bible translations use the term “cursed” or “destruction to.” This word *woe* in the Hebrew language is often used in connection with funeral laments. The New English Translation actually says, “Those who call good evil are as good as dead.”

Be careful of politically correct perspectives. Why? Because many user-friendly terms tend to minimize the evil of certain practices, and make it more difficult for people to see the true sinfulness of these actions and therefore make it more difficult to see the need of a Savior.

The summons is to declare definitively “right” what God calls right, and

Guidelines for Contributors

College and University Dialogue, published three times a year in four parallel language editions, is addressed to Seventh-day Adventists involved in post-secondary education either as students or teachers, and also to Adventist professionals and campus chaplains around the world.

The editors are interested in well written articles, interviews, and reports consistent with *Dialogue's* objectives:

1. To nurture an intelligent, living faith
2. To deepen commitment to Christ, the Bible, and Adventist global mission
3. To articulate a biblical approach to contemporary issues
4. To offer ideas and models of Christian service and outreach.

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“wrong” what God calls wrong, but to do so in a compassionate, Christlike spirit, so that people will see the need of a Savior. Then they will turn to Christ, and He will offer them the forgiveness and the cleansing as stated in 1 John 1:9 (NKJV): “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Non-judgmental accommodation

Finally, the concern of biblical standards is wished away by appealing to non-judgmental accommodation. Many Adventists are painfully aware of the cascade of questions concerning lifestyle issues that have been arising among us—challenges ranging from substance abuse, to sexual behavior, to Sabbath observance. Admittedly, there are some who believe that the Adventist Church and its institutions, including its schools, should be more “open” and “accepting” and should “keep up with the times,” meaning we should relax our position on certain church standards such as dancing, the use of ornamental jewelry, etc.

Indeed, an Adventist social scientist says that “it seems almost certain” that the prohibition of ornamental jewelry “will not hold in the near future of the church.”¹⁰ In fact, a volume published in the year 2001 on Adventist lifestyle issues, warns that “if we continue taking a hard-line, unbending stand regarding less morally defined issues such as [ornamental] jewelry, . . . we can expect to continue seeing them [i.e., the youth] leave our church, many of them never to return.”¹¹

While such dire predictions may sound dismally perplexing, amazingly, carefully researched historical trends, at least in the United States, prove precisely the opposite! Referring to the book *Acts of Faith*, published in the year 2000, Adventist sociologist Edwin Hernandez notes: “Recent research shows that as mainline denominations relaxed their traditional observance of the [Sunday] Sabbath and other time-

consuming practices, members were deprived of the benefits of belonging to such a religion—the distinctive sense of identity and communal belonging. This situation led to a continuing precipitous pattern of membership decline. Between 1960 and 1990, the following mainline denominations had significant membership decline: [United] Methodists—39 percent; [United] Presbyterians—34 percent; [American Baptists—50 percent]; United Church of Christ—48 percent; and Episcopalians—46 percent.¹²

On average, these five mainline churches declined 43 percent, as they became more accommodating and more tolerant by relaxing their lifestyle standards. “Will relaxing the [lifestyle] standards [of the Adventist Church] in order to make them more reasonable and palatable—thus less costly—to modern sensibilities lead to a more vibrant faith?” asks Hernandez. He correctly concludes, based on the considerable evidence from the study of other Protestant denominations that have done this, that the results of lowering standards are indeed “devastating.”

Even before the above scientific analysis was done, Methodist preacher Dean Kelley wrote *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*.¹³ A decade later, in 1982, Kelley was invited to present a paper at Andrews University, on essentially the same issue. He opened his remarks with: “It’s a little ironic, I think, that somebody from one of the declining churches should come to talk about church growth to a body that is growing at very significant, precisely consistent rates.” Later in his presentation Kelley made the following tongue-in-cheek observation: “If Adventists want to stop growing and begin declining like everybody else, all they have to do is emphasize that abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine isn’t really essential to Salvation. Decide that vegetarianism isn’t actually all that important, and foot washing is a little tacky. . . . Recognize that. . . tithing, like the requirements already mentioned,

can be a form of righteousness by works. And (I am almost unable to mention this) introduce the idea that one can worship as well on Sunday as on Saturday!”¹⁴

In simple terms, Kelley was saying: “If you want your church to die, then get rid of your standards and be just like the rest of us.”

There are some who say, “Oh, but you cannot prove the Adventist position on jewelry from Scripture.” Angel Rodriguez has done a painstaking analysis on the whole issue of jewelry in Scripture. Notice his basic summary: “The Adventist standard of jewelry is supported by contextual analysis of the biblical texts.”¹⁵

But our standards must always be Christ-centered. Peter speaks about our “good *conduct* in *Christ*” (1 Peter 3:16, NKJV), or as the NIV puts it: “good *behavior* in *Christ*.” The NET states that others will “see what a *good life you live* because you *belong to Christ*.” Christ-centered church standards—that is, “godly living”—thus translates into positive witnessing opportunities. The way we live our lives will be a living testimony that naturally attracts people to Jesus Christ.

We must uphold Bible-based, Christ-centered standards. Otherwise, based upon the clear evidence from other churches that have abandoned Christian standards, our church will die. If we become like the world, there will be no reason for others to join us, because we will be just like the world.

Yes, let’s be open—open to the Holy Spirit, open to the Word, but not to worldly ways.

A personal challenge

We have considered a few examples of secular thought patterns that are afloat, affecting the lifestyle choices and moral behavior of some believers. In Colossians 2:8 (NIV), Paul cautions: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradi-

Continued on page 34

OPEN FORUM

Burial or cremation?

One of the older members of our family told us that, when he dies, he wishes to be cremated, not buried. This request has caused considerable discussion among us. We're all Christians. Does the Bible provide any guidance on this sensitive subject?

Seventh-day Adventists have never taken a position on cremation because our biblical understanding of death and resurrection makes the matter not significant (see Job 19:27; Daniel 12:2; Luke 24:39). Contrary to the idea of separable soul and body, we note that humans appear with a physical existence both before death and in resurrection. The God who created us in the beginning is equally capable of re-creating us from ashes of incineration or from dust that results from slow decay. All things organic return to their basic elements, the real difference being only in how long it takes.

In fact, we do not hold that in the resurrection the new person will be composed of the same cells and atoms of which the body was previously formed. Cells die and atoms disperse. And restoring the person is not a matter of collection and reassembly of atoms, but of expressing the creative power of God, whatever atoms are involved (Psalm 104:29, 30). We know that every living person is a conduit for new atoms entering and old ones dispersing, so to a large degree any person will be composed in 10 years of an almost entirely different set of atoms.

The person who dies remains in the mind of God, and through His creative power, He will restore life as He wishes, even a new body untouched by the power of sin (1 Corinthians 15:52). The Creator is not dependent

on previously existing components in the resurrection.

Some have used Amos 2:1 to oppose the practice of cremation. The prophet states that God is angered against Moab “because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom’s king” (NIV). The main interpretational problem in this text is the phrase, “as if to lime,” which in Hebrew literally reads “to lime.” The noun *sid* does not mean “ashes” but “lime.” Lime was used to plaster walls and stones. Some have suggested that in this particular case, the bones were burned or calcinated to obtain lime. Be that as it may, it is clear that Moab is being reproved because of its scornful treatment of human remains. Therefore, the prophet is addressing an act of hatred and severe vindictiveness that resulted in the devaluation of human dignity. This was not what we would call cremation.

Cremation, properly speaking, could be a pious act. 1 Samuel 31:11-13 relates how the Israelites took the body of Saul and his sons “from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them” (NIV). This was not an act of vengeance but a proper way of ending the humiliation of a human corpse, the remains of the first king of Israel.

For some Christians, the matter of burial rather than cremation is important. They note that cremation is followed in countries such as India and China, whose predominant worldview is not Christian. As a matter of fact, these overpopulated countries long ago confronted the diversion of scarce fertile land to cemeteries, imbedding into their religion a tradition of burning, understood in terms of the purifying power of fire. Scientifically, we see advantages in the prevention

of infection this method provides. It is true that in Jewish tradition, the dead consistently were buried, a custom written into Catholic canon law and thus perpetuated in the Christian community. But when measured by our understanding of how God works, something like burning would create no problem.

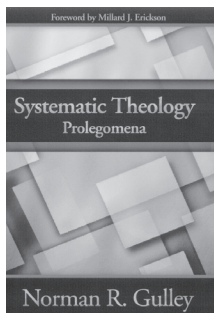
Today approximately 50 percent of those who die in the United States are cremated, mostly because of the comparatively high expense involved in burial. Cremation can cost only 10 percent of what a full burial funeral would require. Adventists allow members to follow their conscience in this matter, and for the reasons cited above are not likely to take an official church position on it.

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BOOKS



**Systematic Theology:
Prolegomena**
by Norman R. Gulley (Berrien Springs,
Michigan: Andrews University Press,
2003; 840 pp.; hardbound).

Reviewed by Denis Fortin

At last, a work on systematic theology by an Adventist scholar! A historic milestone in Adventist scholarship, this massive work will find its unique place in theological understanding and will fill a long-felt void among Adventist and non-Adventist students of theology.

Any study of theology begins with certain philosophical assumptions and presuppositions. The work of Norman Gulley, research professor of systematic theology at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, is no exception. In this first volume of his *Systematic Theology* the author explores these assumptions and presuppositions. Prolegomena is the study of the “first things” of theology, the philosophical and biblical principles that one uses consciously or subconsciously in order to construct a system of doctrines. Although a study of prolegomena is not something familiar for Adventists, since philosophy is not a strong point for most of us, it can nonetheless be a rewarding and faith-affirming experience. In fact, as Gulley amply demonstrates, Adventists have a lot to contribute to the study of theological prolegomena.

In *Prolegomena*, Gulley argues that the foundational principles for the study of the Bible should be limited to those given in the Bible and that non-biblical philosophical concepts and worldviews should not be allowed to determine how one is to understand who God is, how the world was created, or what is the essence of human life. Gulley’s foundational principle is *sola scriptura*, and this leads him to reject the Greek philosophical worldview of the first principle or the universal mind and to accept the biblical worldview of the cosmic controversy between good and evil. This biblical worldview forms the basis on which Gulley constructs his systematic theology (xxiii).

Prolegomena is divided into 15 chapters. The first few chapters deal with a discussion of major philosophers and scientists and how their ideas and movements shaped theology through the centuries. Gulley then moves on to discuss how he views the Bible as the foundation of a systematic theology. But the major part of this volume is dedicated to a study of God’s revelation of Himself in nature and in

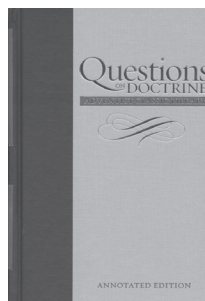
the Scriptures, biblical inspiration, the trustworthiness and authority of the Bible, the biblical worldview, and biblical hermeneutics.

Gulley’s work is a valuable contribution to the study of theology and brings together a vast amount of information and knowledge. Whether he discusses the impact of Kant’s philosophy on theology, Calvin’s ideas on the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, or Gregory Boyd’s contribution to a cosmic warfare theodicy, his command of theological ideas and movements, whether old or new, and how they are inter-related to each other is impressive. But what is even more valuable is Gulley’s critique of these ideas in relationship to the biblical norm.

Any earnest student of theology will benefit from reading this book. However, I believe, only those who already have a basic knowledge of theological and philosophical ideas and movements will be able to truly appreciate its value because the book often assumes that the reader understands the importance of the ideas discussed. *Prolegomena* is not primarily an exposition of biblical teaching on the doctrines it touches on; rather, it is a theological discussion of various ideas proposed by philosophers and theologians, and it is in dialogue with these ideas that Gulley constructs his understanding of the sole relevance and authority of the Bible in doing theology.

The work is done well, and leaves one anticipating the arrival of future volumes.

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Questions on Doctrine,
*Notes with historical and theological
introduction by George R. Knight*
(Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews
University Press, 2003; 597 pp.;
hardcover).

Reviewed by Nancy Vyhmeister

A new *Questions on Doctrine*? I was familiar with the 1957 edition. Its main authors, L. E. Froom and R. A. Anderson, were family friends, and my adolescent mind had been stimulated by their presentations and talk around the family table. In the early 1960s, my husband had used the book as a textbook/reference for his Adventist theology classes at River Plate College, Argentina. But then, the book

had gone out of print—something about its not being true to Seventh-day Adventist thinking. Knight's annotated edition gives the full story.

The old *Questions on Doctrine* (*QOD*) was the product of a series of conferences between Adventist and Protestant scholars. It was intended to answer questions raised by evangelicals with dispensational leanings regarding supposedly “un-Christian” Adventist beliefs. Knight tells the story in his “Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition” (pp. xiii-xxxvi). In essence, Froom and Anderson defended the Adventist position in language understandable to their opponents and yet acceptable to Adventists in general. To do this, they included quotations from other Christian authors who shared their position. One author they did not include was M. L. Andreasen, a prolific and influential Adventist scholar and writer of the 1930s and 1940s. His views were clear and strong, quite well accepted in Adventism and different from those of Froom and Anderson, especially on two items: the atonement and the human nature of Christ. Possibly to ingratiate themselves with the Protestants whom they were addressing, the authors of *QOD* relegated those who held Andreasen's views to the fringes of the church's mainstream, while the Protestants declared Adventists to be true Christians. Andreasen dissented loudly, making peace with the authors only days before his death in 1962.

The question of the atonement was more semantic than real. *QOD* makes the *sacrifice* complete on the cross, while Andreasen insisted on the *atonement* being completed in the sanctuary. Knight points out that both are right.

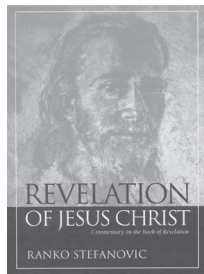
The question of the human nature of Christ was more difficult. Andreasen felt the authors of *QOD* had betrayed the church by not insisting that Christ was born with the post-Fall, sinful nature of human beings. He insisted that this was the traditional Adventist position, and *QOD* had erred in assigning to Christ a pre-Fall human nature. Knight is probably right in saying that *QOD* changed Adventist theology by creating “what appear to be permanently warring factions within the denomination” (p. v) on this subject.

Beyond the fascinating historical background of *QOD*, Knight spends most of his note space on the two issues noted above. On the human nature of Christ, Knight analyzes the topic (pp. 516-526) and presents in full (pp. 532-547) the revised version of Appendix B of *QOD*, consisting mostly of Ellen White quotations, which were published in *Ministry* magazine in 1972, to clarify the issue. An important difference between the two was that *QOD's* heading, “Took Sinless Human Nature” (p. 516), became “In Taking Human Nature Christ Did Not Participate in Its Sin or Propensity to Evil” (p. 537). Knight adds the 27 Fundamental Beliefs (pp. 9-17) and presents a list of representative Adventist theological writings since the time of *QOD* (pp. 498-504).

The text of the old *QOD* appears in full, with the original paging marked in it. All of Knight's notes, historical or theological, are added in shadowed boxes, clearly distinguishing them from the original text. As usual, Knight's clarity of thought and facility of pen provide captivating and informative reading.

Those who have an interest in the history of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, whether they have read *Questions on Doctrine* before or not, will profit from reading this book.

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Revelation of Jesus Christ

by Ranko Stefanovic, (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2002; 654 pp; hardbound).

Reviewed by Gerhard Pfandl

Ranko Stefanovic is an associate professor of New Testament at Andrews University. His commentary on the Book of Revelation is a serious attempt to explain in-depth the text of the book from an Adventist perspective. As is common to scholarly works, the lengthy introduction (50 pages) deals with authorship, place and date of writing, and provides guidelines for interpreting the book. The introduction also has a section on the symbolic nature of the book and deals quite extensively with the literary arrangement of Revelation.

Apart from the prologue (1:1-8) and the epilogue (22:6-21), Stefanovic divides the book into three parts: The messages to the seven churches (1:9-3:22); the opening of the sealed scroll (4:1-11:19), and the content of the seven-sealed scroll (12:1-22:5). The seven-sealed scroll plays a major role in Stefanovic's understanding of the book. He compares it with the book of the covenant that was stored next to the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26) and says, “Only a portion of the sealed scroll was revealed to John in Revelation 10 in the symbolic form of the little scroll. John now [chaps. 12-22] passes on to the churches the contents of the sealed scroll that were disclosed to him” (p. 367).

The analysis of each section begins with the author's own

Continued on page 34

FIRST PERSON

Decision time

by George Javor

Do I sit on the fence indefinitely, or do I commit to be a follower of Jesus? I made my choice.

Every time I hear the majestic, measured notes of the song, "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide," I remember the time when I came to such a point in my life. It was in my second year of graduate school that I decided to visit the New York Center Seventh-day Adventist church, located on West 46th Street, just off Times Square.

It had been many years since I went to church. In the seven years since arriving in the United States as a Hungarian refugee, I had been completely absorbed in finishing

high school, progressing through a brutally difficult chemistry program at an "ivy league" university, working part time during the school year and full time through the summers. The biochemistry department at Columbia University's Presbyterian Medical Center admitted me into their Ph.D. program. The department gave me a stipend to live on and now, having just passed my written comprehensive examinations, all that was left to get my doctorate was to study in depth how *Escherichia coli* regulated its synthesis of ribonucleic acids. A mere few happy years in the laboratory, followed by writing a dissertation.

With a doctoral degree in sight, I felt liberated from the pressure of uncertainty. I began thinking about what I would do after receiving the doctorate. What mattered most was not so much what I would actually be doing later on, but what kind of a person I would become.

At the core of my concern was my relationship with the Lord. Since my early youth back in Hungary, I knew that there was a loving and caring God, who is the Creator and the Lord of everything. In the back of my mind, I always assumed that the Lord was watching and taking care of me, and this notion gave me a sense of security. But during the turbulent seven years since coming to the United States, I had repeatedly deviated from practices in which I was brought up. I began to wonder if it was right for me to expect the Lord's friendship without any reciprocation on my part.

* * *

I was born into a Jewish family in Hungary, right smack at the early phase of World War II. Not an aus-

picious time or place to make one's appearance in the world. My father was not particularly religious, but he had very strong feelings about his Jewish identity. My mother tells me that once he discovered a Christian Bible in her possession, a gift from one of her Jewish-Adventist friends. My father reportedly threw a tantrum and tore the Bible to pieces in front of my mother.

Along with all able-bodied Jewish men, my father was conscripted by the Hungarian Army into labor battalions, a workforce for heavy manual field labor. These defenseless men were taken to the Russian front to build roads, bridges, dig trenches, and do whatever was asked of them. Shortly after the Russians trounced the German-led coalition in 1942, my mother received notice that my father had disappeared in the vicinity of the city of Kursk. That was the last we heard of him.

In Budapest, all Jews were required to wear the yellow Star of David on their outer garments, so that they could be singled out of the general population. This was the first step toward the extermination of my race. My mother somehow obtained false identification papers, which stated that our family name was "Krecsмарik" (instead of "Schwartz," our real name) and that we came to Budapest, running from the advancing Russian Army. Obviously, we did not wear the Star of David.

After the war, my mother changed our family name from "Schwartz" to "Javor." This was done to gain relief from the endemic anti-Semitism of the society of that time, as all Jews in Hungary had family names of German origin. In contrast, "Javor" (a Slavic name) provided a measure of protection.

Budapest was bombed by the Allies, and everyone lived in bomb shelters. These were large, dimly lit moldy-smelling rooms in the basements of apartment houses, where everyone

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stayed except when the “all clear” signal was given. Here I would be playing with boys of my age when one of them would ask me my name. I would run to my mother, calling out to her quite loudly “Mother, what’s my name?” Naturally, we would have to move to another shelter where no one knew us, until a similar episode occurred. During this period, my mother joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her friendship with two Jewish-Adventist ladies was decisive in this step, and she felt safe in her newfound Christian fellowship. After the war, my mother continued to attend church. Every Sabbath, she and I would go to number 13 Szekely Bertalan Street, the “A” meetinghouse, where the largest Adventist church in Budapest was located. At that time, elementary schools were in session on Saturdays, and students were required to attend. However, we went to church instead.

In the lower grades, my mother worked it out with my homeroom teacher that, for a small fee, he would tutor me in the afternoons on the missed material. Later, in the upper grades, I was simply marked absent for Saturdays, but no one troubled us about it, possibly because I was getting excellent marks.

At the church, I would attend the children’s Sabbath school and then sit through what to me seemed interminably long sermons. Indeed, in those days, a minister did not bother to get behind the pulpit if he did not hold onto it for a solid hour. Likewise, the prayers went on for long periods, to the detriment of my knees.

But there were also high points. There was the choir’s rendition of famous pieces by the Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly, with the composer sitting in the audience. I watched this white-haired music icon, as he listened to the music with his eyes closed.

I also enjoyed the slide shows, where colored slides were projected onto the front wall of the auditorium. One

particular slide, the coming of Jesus on the clouds surrounded by angels, made a deep impression on me.

Sundays frequently found me in the hills of Budapest with my friends from the church. In the summer we hiked and played ball, and in the winter we sled down the snowy slopes, half freezing to death. We also went on extended bicycle excursions, which sometimes involved even overnight camping. All this came to an abrupt halt when I left Hungary for the West in the aftermath of the Hungarian revolution of 1956.

* * *

The New York Center Adventist Church had a very nice auditorium with a stage and comfortable chairs. The minister, J. Reynolds Hoffmann, gave remarkably penetrating talks, which kept me coming back for more. The church members were friendly and the young people invited me to join in their activities. Over the months, I began to feel more and more comfortable coming to church.

Then it hit me. I have known all my life the truths of the Bible. But they were a set of propositions that I kept at arm’s length. Even though I accepted them intellectually, they were not impacting my life. The text “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32, KJV) came to mind very forcefully. I felt that the time had come for me to decide. Do I sit on the fence indefinitely, or do I commit to be a follower of Jesus? I made my choice.

Pastor Hoffman baptized me in 1964. From that point, all my important decisions were made from the perspective of a follower of Jesus. I ordered my professional and social life to be in harmony with my confession of faith. I chose to associate with other young people who would assist me in my faith journey.

In those years, Adventist young people were organized into Missionary Volunteer Societies, and I was given

the task of leading the local group. A lovely young woman was chosen as the assistant leader. Working together, Shirley and I became close friends, and shortly before receiving my Ph.D. degree, we married. Thirty-eight years later, I am still convinced that this was among the best choices I have ever made.

From New York we moved to Andrews University, where I joined the chemistry department. There our two sons were born. Now one is an electrical engineer and the other a physician. Each has found a lovely wife, welcome additions to our family.

While still in graduate school, I was able to bring my mother to New York to live with me. Although she has not been able to rid herself completely of the demons of World War II, time and the peaceful surroundings have been therapeutic. As she is approaching her 98th birthday, I am reminded that her bravery in World War II and her decision to become a Christian were two of the most decisive factors of my life. Those of us who are blessed with loving mothers have an easier time sensing God’s love for humanity.

When the Spirit prompts us to make potentially life-changing decisions, we may not be in a position to understand the consequences of our choice. But we may be certain, that He, who speaks to our hearts, has our best long-term interest in mind. Happy is the person who hears and responds to His loving promptings.

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Thinking straight

Continued from page 28.

tion and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” That is the basic choice all must face: Human tradition or Jesus Christ? So, as Paul challenges: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5, ESV).

The Scripture summons us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2, NKJV). For, as we have the mind of Christ developed in us, God will work through our transformed lives, to attract others to Jesus Christ.

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2. Robert Wright, *Time* (15 August 1994), pp. 44-

Correction

Computer problems caused three typographical errors in the article “Science discovers God,” by Ariel A. Roth, published in *Dialogue* 17:2. On p. 5, where it reads “number 1040” it should read “number 10⁴⁰.” On p. 6, where it reads “followed by 10,123 zeros,” it should read “followed by 10²³ zeros,” and where it reads “it would take 1023 years,” it should read “it would take 10²³ years.” The editors regret these errors.

- 52 (emphasis added).
3. John Ratey, *User's Guide to the Brain* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 34; quoted in Vicki Griffin, “The Learning Brain,” *Lake Union Herald* (April 2004), p. 10.
4. See http://www.unaids.org/wad2004/EPIupdate2004_html_en/epi04_00_en.htm.
5. “AIDS,” *Journal of Health & Healing*, 26:4 (2005): pp. 21, 22.
6. Erin Curry, “New Analysis Nulls Claims That Virginity Pledges Don't Work,” *Baptist Press* (22 July 2005); see <http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?ID=21261>.
7. G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 200 (emphasis added).
8. For a sound biblical study of homosexuality, see Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1998).
9. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1940), p. 806 (emphasis added); see also *Education* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 57.
10. Roger Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories from a 10-Year Study* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 2000), p. 41.
11. Keavin Hayden, *Lifestyles of the Remnant* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 2001), p. 125; see also, pp. 56-74.
12. Edwin I. Hernandez, “A Call for the Renewal of Adventism's Communal Consciousness,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 10 (Summer 2001): pp. 291-292. He was referring to the work of Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000), p. 152. In his overview of Presbyterians, as an example of this declining membership trend, Hernandez specifically refers to the issue of “dress codes” as one area they relaxed in an attempt to promote so-called “openness” and “freedom of conscience.”
13. See Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
14. Dean M. Kelley, “How Adventism Can Stop Growing,” *Adventists Affirm* (Spring 1991), p. 48.
15. Angel Manuel Rodriguez, *Jewelry in the Bible: What You Always Wanted to Know but Were Afraid to Ask* (Silver Spring, Maryland: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists), p. 110.

Revelation

Continued from page 31

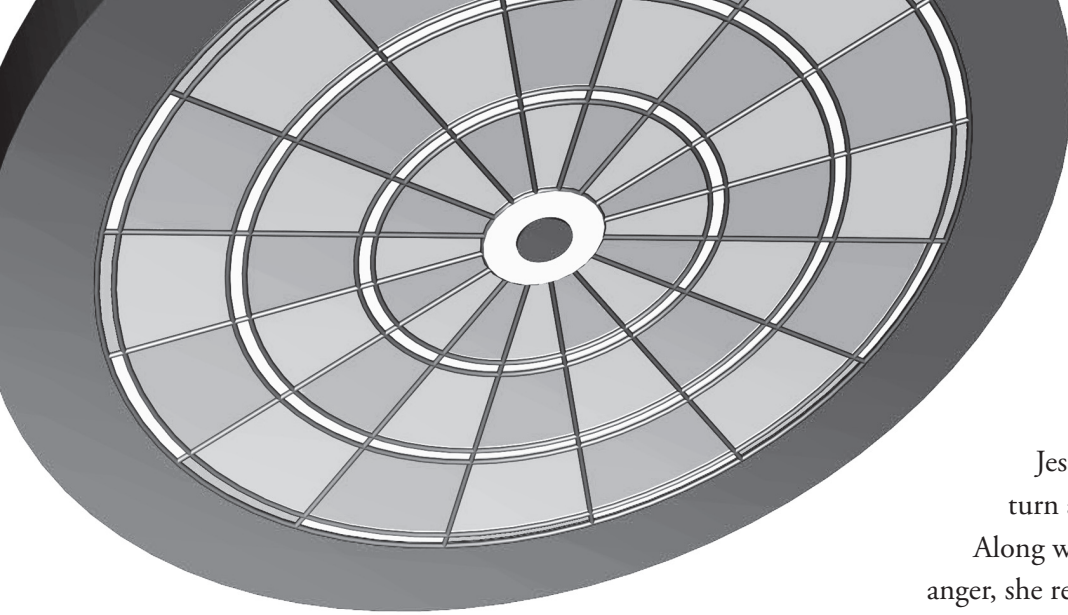
translation of the Greek text, followed by notes, including scholarly discussions on key words and phrases. The verse-by-verse exposition of each chapter is rounded out by a concluding “retrospect” section which summarizes

the findings and explains the relationship each chapter has to what follows.

Adventist and non-Adventist readers will greatly benefit from the insights this commentary provides on the text of Revelation. However, many Adventist readers will be disappointed by some of the conclusions Stefanovic reaches in his interpretation, and by the fact that some traditional Adventist interpretations are missing. For example, Stefanovic believes that the “Lord’s day” in 1:10 is the eschatological day of the Lord (p. 93) rather than the Sabbath day as Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally held. In the interpretation of the 1260 days and 42 months, Stefanovic applies this prophetic time period of 1260 years to the persecution of God’s people during the Middle Ages without “being dogmatic about precise date-fixings in church history” (p. 338). Readers, therefore, will not find the traditional Adventist dates 538 A.D. or 1798 A.D. in the book. Neither will they find a clear statement that the sea beast in 13:1 is the papacy, though there are several references to the “political-religious” or “Medieval ecclesiastical power” (pp. 407, 411, 412). The land beast, however, is clearly identified as the United States (p. 423), with the caveat that “the full disclosure of the meaning of the land monster still awaits us” (p. 424).

Despite some interpretative weaknesses, Stefanovic’s volume fills a long-standing need for a good in-depth Adventist commentary on Revelation. It will help those who are serious in their endeavor to understand the Book of Revelation.

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The target

Professor Smith was known for his imaginative and memorable lessons in his Christian Doctrines course. One student, Jessica, remembers vividly what happened one morning early in the semester.

As she walked into the classroom, she knew it would be an interesting class. On the wall was a big cardboard target, complete with a bull's eye, and many darts sat on a nearby desk.

Dr. Smith finished his exposition, and gave each of the students a blank piece of paper on which they were to draw a sketch of someone they detested or who had made them very angry. Once they finished, he would allow them to throw three darts at the person's picture. That was the quiz for the day.

One of Jessica's classmates drew a picture of a girl who had stolen her boyfriend. Another student sketched his younger brother, who always managed to embarrass him in public. Jessica drew the face of Annie, a former friend who had lied to her repeatedly. She put a great deal of detail into her drawing, including pimples and warts on her face. Jessica was quite pleased with the overall effect she had achieved.

The class lined up and, one by one, each student taped the picture to the target and threw darts at the sketches of those who had made them angry and resentful.

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Some threw their darts with such force that their targets ripped apart. After each had their turn, the students returned to their seats laughing and joking, with the defaced sketches in their hands.

Jessica had been looking forward to her turn and felt disappointed that time was up. Along with others who could not vent their anger, she returned to her seat. She sat down rather angrily and waited to see what would happen in the few minutes that remained.

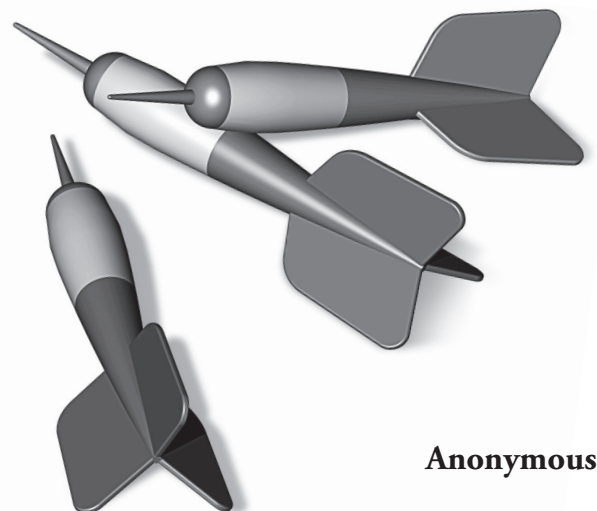
Dr. Smith gently removed the original target from the wall. Every eye was focused on him. Underneath the target was a picture of Jesus.

A hush fell over the room as each student viewed the mangled image; holes and jagged marks covered His face, and His eyes had been pierced.

Then the professor opened his Bible and slowly read these words of Jesus: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40, RSV).

No other words were necessary, as the tear-filled eyes of many students focused on the picture of Christ and soberly reflected on His words.

How would you have handled this test? It is the test of life. And the choice is yours.



Anonymous



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Invitation

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