

C O L L E G E A N D U N I V E R S I T Y
DIALOGUE

E n g l i s h • F r e n c h • P o r t u g u e s e • S p a n i s h



**Can a Christian
be a good scientist?**

**Looking for
(present) truth**

**Every town needs
a carpenter**

**Who do you say
that I am?**

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Volume 24



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EDITORIAL

Ses·qui·cen·ten·ni·al



United for Mission

When U.S. president Abraham Lincoln wanted to enshrine certain historic events forever in the minds of his hearers, he started with: “Four score and seven years ago, ...” and followed with the most significant analysis and motivation in American history. In his now-famous Gettysburg Address, he pointed his hearers in two directions: back to the framing of the American Constitution, and also forward to a future they would have a part in shaping, based on the freedoms that document codifies.

I invite you to reflect on what happened, not “four score and seven years ago,” but 150 years ago. What happened then was the official founding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Following what appeared to be a disastrous disappointment in 1844, 20 people met at Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1863 to decide what direction their small group should take, and where they should go from here. Like us, they wanted to make a difference. And they did. They “formed the ‘General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists’ — an organized church, focused on mission and on proclaiming the good news of a God who created us, lived among us, died for us, and redeems us.”

Notably, many of our founders were young people. African-Americans and Chinese numbered among the ordained preachers and medical missionaries. Women carried key responsibilities from the church’s earliest days. At first, the church was small, and progress came slowly. But in the years since 1900, the growth of our church has been exponential. Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a missionary presence in 200 countries of the world and is on course to have a membership of 20,000,000 by 2020. In this way, united for mission, the eternal gospel is being proclaimed to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people, *by* every nation, tribe, language and people.

The worldwide church has designated May 18, 2013, a day of prayer, remembrance, and focus on mission. Each local congregation is encouraged to mark the “sesquicentennial” of Seventh-day Adventists being united for mission. Each member is called to advance with purpose and courage.

This international journal of faith, thought, and action is published two to three times a year in four parallel editions (English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish) by the Committee on Adventist Ministry to College and University Students (AMiCUS) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln did not leave his hearers with thoughts directed only to the past. On the contrary, he challenged them to ensure that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” In the same way, we should keep our sights on the bright future that awaits everyone who is faithful and loves Christ’s appearing (see 2 Timothy 4:8). If our pioneers’ lives made a difference — as it clearly did — how much of a difference can your life make? The future that awaits us is much brighter than the past that inspires us. Now is not the time to become distracted with the thought of just having a good career, a comfortable life, and all the nice things that go with such things. These things are good, but there is more. I challenge you to live your lives in a way that is successful,

yes, but that also claims your place in history and truly makes a difference.

Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy

—Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy,
Editor-in-Chief

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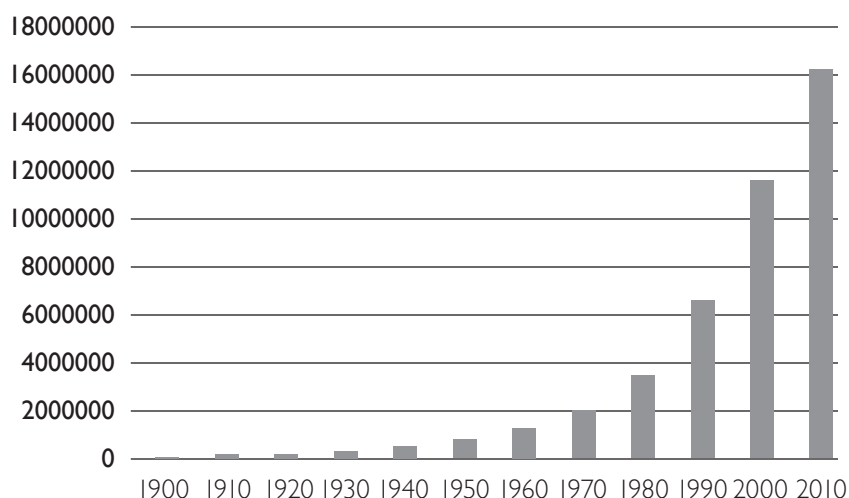
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Seventh-day Adventist Membership



Can a Christian be a good scientist?

by John F. Ashton

It is the scientists who believed in God the Creator and the truths of the Bible who laid the foundations of modern science.

Studying science can be one of life's most exciting and rewarding experiences. However, Christians studying science can sometimes be challenged by teachers and fellow students claiming that only people who are uneducated or ignorant of discoveries in biology, geology, archaeology, and astronomy could still believe the Bible account is true. Let me reassure you that I have met and talked with many outstanding scientists who not only believe in the miracles of the Bible but also testify that the truths in God's Word have helped them be successful in their personal lives and in their scientific careers.¹ In fact, it was Christian scientists who helped me come to know Jesus as my Savior. Let me share my experience.

I began my career as a trainee physicist at the BHP Central Research Laboratories in Australia. (Now the world's largest mining company, in the 1960s BHP was already the largest steelmaker in the southern hemisphere.) I was appointed assistant to a recently-arrived scientist who had been a university academic gold medalist and had just completed postdoctoral studies at Imperial College, London. He was a meticulous record-keeper. Every page in his log books was pre-stamped with a number, all results had to be recorded, all equipment needed

to be kept in full calibration with reference standards regularly checked against primary standards. From him I learned the techniques of first-class research; he also talked to me about Jesus.

At the time, I was a nominal Christian who ticked the Methodist box on forms. Because my supervisor was a Christian concerned for my salvation, he urged me to read the book *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, which I did. This scientist's lifestyle was a sharp contrast to that of most others in our section, who had also been educated at top-flight institutions like Cambridge University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They were usually either heavy smokers or drinkers. In my early teens, I had made my own decision to never smoke or drink. As I observed the apparent emptiness of these scientists' lives, who boasted of their drinking, and saw the contrast with the positiveness of my Christian mentor, I began to seriously ask questions such as, "Is there really a personal God?" and "How can I find out about God?"

Midway through my studies, I changed from a specialization in physics and mathematics to chemistry, and for my honors year I chose a project that would be supervised by the head of the university's chemistry depart-

ment. As I worked for this professor, an author of internationally-published textbooks, I learned that he, too, was a Christian. Whenever I went to his office, I was greeted with a beaming smile and a hearty, "Come in, John! What can I do for you?" This was usually followed up by some humorous comment, such as, "Have you found a girlfriend yet?" He was never too busy to see me and always enthusiastically supported my research ideas while making guiding suggestions that I "might like to consider." This professor, who was known for his positive nature and interest in people, gave me such encouragement that I achieved top of my honors class and was awarded a prestigious academic prize.

Just after finishing my university degree, I decided to begin attending church. I chose to go to a nearby Seventh-day Adventist church, because when my father had died some nine years earlier, a Seventh-day Adventist dentist had shown our family much kindness. Since this dentist knew I was studying science, he had given me a very expensive slide rule. (These were used in the days before pocket calculators.) I had looked up Sabbath in an encyclopedia and read that the biblical Sabbath was Saturday, so I knew that was the right day to go to church to worship God. I applied for a

postgraduate research scholarship, and I remember my first prayer asked God to help me get it. A couple of months later, I received a positive answer to that prayer when I was awarded the Tioxide Research Fellowship — the highest-paying chemistry research scholarship then offered in Australia. I continued attending church on the Sabbath, and just over 18 months later I accepted Jesus as my Savior and was baptized.

Accuracy of the Bible

As I look back on those experiences of 40 years ago, I praise God for His leading in my life. Not only have I personally experienced many positive answers to prayer and enjoyed excellent health from following biblical health principles, I've also learned about the archaeological evidence supporting the historical accuracy of the Bible² and have researched the evidence for the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.³ I've also learned that many of the scientists

who laid the foundations of modern science were Bible-believing Christians. These pioneering figures include Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Johannes Kepler, Carl Linnaeus, Michael Faraday, Samuel Morse, Charles Babbage, Matthew Maury, James Joule, Louis Pasteur, George Mendel, Lord Kelvin, Joseph Lister, James Clerk Maxwell, and John Ambrose Fleming.⁴ For example, Maury, a pioneering oceanographer, believed that the Bible could be used as a guide to understanding nature. After reading Psalm 8:8, which talks about the paths of the seas, he looked for these paths and discovered the ocean currents and much more.⁵

Leading philosophers — such as Lynn White, who taught at Princeton, Stanford, and UCLA — recognize that it was the domination of Western Europe's Christian worldview in the Middle Ages that provided the environment for science to flourish there, and not in other parts of the world, where non-Christian cultures

dominated.⁶ Science could not make significant progress in these cultures because of the perceived risk of offending local gods or because the focus of the cultures was on discovering signs and purpose in nature. Within the Christian worldview, British scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon successfully proposed that scientists should work together to discover how nature worked, and thus improve the condition of humans. Following on from Bacon, French mathematician Rene Descartes believed that God had created mathematical order in the universe. He proposed that by studying small parts of nature in detail and summing the parts mathematically, the laws governing the universe could be discovered. Thus, the concept of reductionism was conceived. When the devout Christian and Bible scholar Isaac Newton discovered calculus, it opened the way for him to explain many of the laws of physics that we know today (for example, the laws of motion and the law of gravity). Thus, scientists who believed in God the Creator and the truths of the Bible laid the foundations of modern science, which enabled subsequent generations of scientists to develop the technologies we enjoy today.⁷

As I think about the knowledge I have gained over the years, it makes me realize that it is those who have not read and learned the truths of the Bible who are in reality the ignorant ones. The characteristics of a good scientist, such as integrity, attention to detail, humility, willingness to recognize mistakes, inquisitiveness, the desire to search for and discover the truth, and caring for others and for the environment, are all aligned with, if not directly based upon, the biblical Christian worldview.

Challenge of evolution

One aspect of science research that continues to challenge me, however, is the widespread acceptance of the theory of evolution as an explanation

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of how life came to be, although there is still no experimental evidence to support this theory. Biophysicist Lee Spetner, who taught information theory at Johns Hopkins University for many years, points out that there is no evidence of purposeful genetic information arising by chance mutations, and on the basis of probability theory, it is impossible.⁸ Also, there is still no known mechanism that can explain how a living cell could arise from non-living molecules.⁹

In his latest book, Oxford University professor and atheist Richard Dawkins gives a single example that he claims is evidence of new purposeful genetic information arising by chance. This example relates to the work of Richard Lenski and his team of researchers at the department of microbiology and molecular genetics at Michigan State University.¹⁰ However, Lenski and his colleagues are not sure of the mechanism that produced the change in genetic information, and both possible mechanisms proposed by the researchers involve preexisting genetic information.¹¹ In other words, the world's foremost advocate of evolution — Richard Dawkins — has not provided a single proven example of experimental evidence for the type of evolution that would be needed to produce the first eye, the first jointed legs, the first feathers, and the vast amount of new genetic information associated with all the different types of living things that exist.

Leading educators admit there is still no known mechanism that explains how new purposeful genetic information can form. This remains a major research focus in biology. As one well-regarded educational website puts it, “Biologists are not arguing about these conclusions [that many biologists believe life on earth has evolved]. But they are trying to figure out how evolution happens — and that’s not an easy job.”¹²

Over the years, I have met many leading scientists who have realized that

the scientific evidence we have available to us today strongly supports the Bible’s account of how we came to be here.¹³ I recently learned that former Cornell University geneticist John Sanford, inventor of the gene gun used in genetic engineering, has become a young-earth six-day creationist on the basis of scientific evidence showing that human DNA is deteriorating at an alarming rate, and thus cannot be millions of years old.¹⁴

Science is the study of God’s creation. It involves observing nature and carrying out experiments that give us insights into how we can be the best stewards of His handiwork. Being a Christian and reading God’s Word — the Bible — gives us added insights from the Creator Himself. The apostle Paul reminds us that we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do the good works which God Himself prepares for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). So, can a Christian be a good scientist? I will let you be the judge of that.

John F. Ashton (Ph.D., University of Newcastle, Australia) has held senior positions in tertiary education and industrial research for more than 30 years. Currently, he is the strategic research manager for the Sanitarium Health Food Company and also serves as adjunct associate professor of biomedical sciences at Victoria University, Australia. He has co-authored more than 100 science-related articles and research papers, as well as a dozen books.

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Looking for (present) truth

by Roberto Badenas

As members of the body of Christ, we are meant to be His present and redeemed community, the concrete incarnation of present truth and of the ideals of His everlasting kingdom.

To speak about *truth* is not an easy undertaking. There is no single definition of truth about which the majority of scholars agree, and the prevailing definitions continue to be widely debated. The classical philosophers paved the way for Thomas Aquinas to define truth as “the conformity between thing and intellect.”¹ This remained for many centuries the common dictionary definition: truth is a form of agreement between affirmation and reality. Things started to change when Emmanuel Kant stated that the classical definition of truth is in fact a mere form of circular reasoning,² and Kierkegaard argued that “truth is subjectivity. A human being cannot find truth separate from the subjective experience of one’s own existing.”³ Friedrich Nietzsche added that what we call truth is just “an invention of fixed conventions for merely practical purposes,”⁴ and Erich Fromm concluded that the idea of *absolute truth* has become obsolete.⁵

Current definitions of truth

Thus the debate about truth has led to a large spectrum of definitions. One reason for this is the variety of senses in which the word *truth* is used.⁶ For many, since the time of Aristotle, truth is still defined as a correspondence between a statement and the reality (*correspondence theo-*

ry). According to this view, an affirmation is true when it corresponds to the reality it supposedly describes.⁷ For others, truth means the logical coherence between what is said and the facts, at least within a system (*coherence theory*).⁸ From this viewpoint, a statement is true if it does not contain inner contradictions.⁹ Others hold that truth is whatever is agreed upon by some specified group (*consensus theory*).¹⁰ For some, truth is constructed by social, historical and cultural processes, but it does not reflect any external reality (*constructivist theory*).¹¹ For others, truth is identified by its effectiveness when applying concepts to actual practice (*pragmatic theory*).¹² The deflationary or minimalist theories argue that “to say that a statement is true is just to perform the act of agreeing with, accepting or endorsing a statement” (*performative theory*).¹³ And for others, truth is just a redundant concept, a word traditionally used in conversation, mainly for emphasis, but which does not actually equate to anything in reality (*redundancy theory*).¹⁴

In spite of these variations of definitions, the search for truth goes on.¹⁵ “In the scientific world there is a quest for truth, a desire to expand the human understanding of reality. Physicists seek the truth about

the processes of the created universe, physiologists seek the truth about the processes of the human body, and psychologists seek the truth about the processes of the mind. Historians seek the truth about the events and developments that shaped the human past.”¹⁶

Biblical definitions of truth

It is not my purpose to argue against any of the above-mentioned theories of truth, although this would be quite interesting. Here I would like to consider the biblical concept of truth, as presented in some New Testament passages.

The word *truth* (in Greek, *aletheia*) is often used in the New Testament as the translation for the Hebrew *emet*, with four distinctive meanings:

1. Truth as opposed to error (cf. Ephesians 4:25). This use is more or less philosophical.
2. Truth as moral integrity, reliability or sincerity, opposed to deception (cf. John 8:44). This use is mainly ethical.
3. Truth as reality, a counterpart to types, symbols, shadows (cf. Colossians 2:17) or mere appearances (cf. Philippians 1:18). This use is especially hermeneutical and theological.
4. Truth as a synonym of “the

Christian faith” (like in 2 Peter 1:12, NASB). This ecclesial use is well known to Adventists.

Jesus defined truth as embodied in Himself: “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14:6), a definition that includes all, the four mentioned dimensions, since Jesus was at the same time: (1) true to God; (2) His reliable messenger; (3) the fulfilment of the Old Testament types; and (4) the embodiment of God’s revelation. If we agree truth to be a disclosure that consists in the uncovering or coming to light of what is real,¹⁷ Jesus’ definition of truth corresponds well to what we call *revelation*, since in Him God revealed Himself to us in a unique way. This incarnate definition of truth should be a valid paradigm for us.

Present truth

2 Peter 1:12 says to Christians, “You have been established in the present truth.” What does this statement mean? Since the word “truth” is viewed with a multiplicity of meanings, we need to clarify the sense of the word *present* that qualifies the noun truth. The adjective *parouse*, translated “present,” can have at least three meanings:

Spatial: A truth that is manifested, not hidden or absent. The word *parouse* is related to *parousia*, “manifestation” (cf. v. 9 and Colossians 1:5ff.). In this sense, present truth would be a truth that appears clearly to the observers.¹⁸

Temporal: A truth that is not only past or future, but relevant for today.

Existential: A truth related to the spiritual experience of believers (cf. 2 Timothy 3:7 and 3 John 1:8). The truth in which believers have been taught.¹⁹ In this case, present truth would refer to “Christian doctrine.”²⁰

Our contention is that the biblical phrase “present truth” includes these three senses. In our Adventist history, we have abundantly used the

expression “present truth” in this last sense, but sometimes with a restrictive scope, as if it meant just “the Adventist message.” There is nothing to object to in this internal use, for it belongs to our heritage and has a high inspirational value in our tradition. But I would like to pay closer attention here to the phrase “present truth,” taking into consideration all its possible meanings.

“Present truth” in the Adventist tradition

Fritz Guy, an Adventist theologian, states: “One of the great characteristics of the Adventist heritage is its commitment to truth, a commitment that has typically been vigorous and often courageous. This commitment was expressed in a willingness to stand against the world if evidence indicated that was the way of truth, and also in a willingness to disagree with others within the community of faith if that was required by loyalty to truth.”²¹

“The idea of ‘present truth’ — truth whose time has come — is the most important single element in the Adventist theological heritage. While eternal truth is by definition always true, a particular element of truth may take particular relevance at a particular time. Truth can thus be understood as both eternal and dynamic.”²² For Christian students and scholars, the very word *truth* ought to mean discovery and growth. To be authentically Christian in the most profound sense is to be as deeply committed to the truth we have yet to learn as to the truth we already know. In this sense, it clearly appears that “any attempt to make particular past understandings, whatever their historical setting, the final criterion of the present and future interpretation of faith is not just a bad idea; it is a betrayal of the basic Adventist principle of ‘present truth.’”²³

Some believers, anxious to be faith-

ful to the truth revealed by God to His people, seem to overlook the challenges of the present world and live looking into the past in order to be sure that they do not depart from the pioneers’ present truth. Others, eager to respond to the world around them, do not hesitate to trim God’s revelation in their search for relevance to face the challenges of the present. To escape the traps of these two extremes, it becomes necessary to overcome the temptation of separating realities that belong together. For fidelity to the biblical text, we cannot separate “truth” from “present.”²⁴

Commitment to truth

As Christians, we have a double commitment: to God’s revealed truth and to the present world in which God has placed us with a mission (Matthew 28:18-20). Our two commitments — truth and present — sometimes may seem in conflict. Some of our contemporaries, sensitive to scientific trends, have a hard time making the biblical notion of truth compatible with their view of reality. As Christian scholars, we may feel caught in the painful tension between “present” and “truth,” as if these two realities were almost two worlds apart. We are tempted to withdraw from either world by capitulating to the other. We often struggle to remain faithful to the revelation of yesterday so that we may see its implications for the realities of today. While it may not be easy to combine loyalty to the past with sensitivity to the present, this is our Christian calling and mission: to live in the world under the Word. As disciples of Christ, we are called to uplift the present truth and a truth that is present.

If we believe that the task of the Christian scholar is to search for the truth, to hold on to the truth and to teach the truth, we may agree that for us as individuals “as well as for the community of faith, commitment

to truth is the first and highest principle of theology. Because theology is a cognitive enterprise, truth is its supreme value.”²⁵ As members of the body of Christ, we have a personal and collective commitment to truth.

Truth as doctrine

In the classical western world, truth was supposed to be found by reason and reflection. Enlightened thinking was expected to produce virtuous actions, so that the rational person would be the good person. Thus, for Plato, “there will be no end to the troubles of states, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers.”²⁶ This idea is still alive today in what has been called the fundamental western myth: “the myth of the head, of the mind, of the importance of rational and impersonal logic.”²⁷

When translated into Christian terms, the classical view equates truth with reason and doctrinal propositions. This intellectual view of truth is evident in the popular idea that religion is a personal matter, a private decision, depending on beliefs. This doctrinal approach to truth often makes spirituality so worried with the right formulation of our beliefs and the defence of our dogmas that it may forget the centrality of committing one’s self to God in everyday life. From this viewpoint, knowledge is mainly theoretical, and makes it possible for a scholar to recognize the Bible “as the incarnation of knowledge and truth, and to see himself as its orthodox teacher... and preach the commandments and yet steal or commit adultery or rob the temple” (cf. Romans 2:21, 22). By such inconsistencies, says Paul, the name of God is blasphemed.²⁸ Our personal experience shows that our actions may depart somehow from our stated beliefs. Our intellectual assent to certain doctrines does not always

include putting into practice some of their implications. So, for example, we can argue publicly a lot about God’s sovereignty while not allowing Him to always rule over our private lives. One of the problems of traditional Christianity all along the ages is its tendency to elevate *orthodoxy* (right thinking) above *orthopraxis* (right action). We do not need to go far in history to observe that the presumption of possessing the truth often led to arrogance, intolerance, or worse.

The truth “as it is in Jesus”

Jesus Christ, our master and model, gave us a perfect example of what it means to be committed to truth. In His words and deeds, both public and private, were consistent. He had one whole life, not a compartmentalized professional life, social life, spiritual life, and so forth. Departing from the prevailing line of thought that most philosophers of His time — and ours — shared, Jesus warned that “knowing the truth” is not only an intellectual endeavor, but an existential liberating experience (cf. John 8:32). This kind of knowledge is a commitment process that engages the whole person. Compartmentalized thinking is foreign to the true disciples of Christ. They are called to make truth present in theory and action, in belief and behavior, in cognition and commitment. Commitment to truth requires that the Christian scholar be “scrupulous in assembling the evidence, honest in recognizing arguments against one’s position, fair in assessing the force of these arguments, sympathetic in representing the position of those with whom one disagrees.”²⁹ In this sense, to uphold truth requires as much humility and courage as knowledge and intelligence.

Living truth

Our concern here is this: how can we deal with truth in a way that our

personal life is transformed, making us better people, and enhancing our mission as a church? Paul says that conversion is supposed to affect our way of thinking, and that we are to be “transformed by the renewal of our minds” (Romans 12:1-2). This new way of thinking, according to the biblical view of the person as a whole entity, does not leave room for a dichotomy of thought and action. According to the Bible, truth is primarily relational. Reality and truth are better known not only by rational reflection, but by direct experience as well. Real knowledge of God is therefore mainly empiric, and grows out of a personal encounter with Him. Personal knowledge of God is not merely knowledge of propositions concerning Him. It is not the result of speculative thinking, but the result of a personal experience with God and with His saving work (cf. Deuteronomy 4:39; Jeremiah 22:15-16). In this sense, therefore, to know the truth is more than to know *about* it. To know God — source of ultimate Truth — is to encounter and experience Him, to listen and to obey Him. This is why in the Bible faith is not a mere product of reason. It is not just an intellectual certainty on matters of doctrine. Doesn’t James say that even the devils “believe” without knowing or having faith in the biblical sense (cf. James 2:19)? For faith, according to the New Testament, is an attitude of trust and commitment to a Person rather than just to a list of beliefs,³⁰ although those beliefs are important. What I am arguing is that faith should take us beyond a detached and speculative outlook into the sphere of personal involvement (John 8:31-32). True faith makes truth present in one’s life.

Making truth present

How can we deal with truth in a way that our whole lives are penetrated by it, giving us a clearer perception of our present reality and of

our mission? How can we make truth present in our personal life?

If the task of the Christian scholar is to search for the truth, to know the truth and to teach the truth, one would expect, therefore, that Christian scholars would reflect in their life better than anybody else the results of that commitment. Truth is powerful when it is argued, but it is even more powerful when it is embodied. There is power in prayer, but there is even more power if we pray and act at the same time. There is power in truth, but there is even more in a truth that is present. For people need not only to understand the arguments of our faith, but to see their benefits displayed. One Christian student in a class, a nurse in a hospital, a secretary in an office, an assistant in a shop, or a worker in a factory, committed to making truth present can have an influence out of all proportion to numbers and percentages. As Christians, we have a mission. We are marked people both in school, at work and at home; the world is watching us (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 12:1-2).

A Church that makes truth present

As members of the body of Christ, we are meant to be His present and redeemed community, the concrete incarnation of truth and of the ideals of His kingdom. The small group was our Lord's own chosen way of action. He began with the twelve. The history of the church that came after them abounds in examples of the strategic influence of small groups. Throughout the centuries, humanity has been led by daring minorities. Tom Sine has captured this idea well in his book *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, whose title alludes to the tiny seed out of which a large bush grows. Its sub-title is "You can make a difference in tomorrow's troubled world."³¹ And this is his main idea:

"Jesus let us in on an astonishing secret. God has chosen to change the world through the lowly, the unassuming and the imperceptible.... That has always been God's strategy – changing the world through *the conspiracy of the insignificant*. He chose a ragged bunch of Semite slaves to become the insurgents of his new order.... And who would have ever dreamed that God would choose to work through a baby in a stall to turn the world right side up! "God chose the foolish things ... the weak things ... the lowly things ... the things that are not.... It is still God's policy to work through the embarrassingly insignificant present to change his world and create his future."³²

Commenting on this idea, John Stott wrote: "The embarrassingly insignificant present. I feel the need to underline this topsy-turvy policy which God has adopted. At the same time, I am anxious that we should grasp that it is realistic. What minorities lack in numbers, they can make up in conviction and commitment."³³

Motivated by their love to Christ and humankind and their commitment to truth, the early Christians, the Reformers, and their heirs, including the Adventist Church, went everywhere preaching the Word of God and changing the world, because nothing has such a humanizing influence as the gospel. In their endeavor to make truth present, God's people founded schools and hospitals; took care of the blind and the deaf, the orphaned and the widowed, the sick and the dying; fought against the slave trade; improved the conditions of workers in mills and mines, and prisoners; protected children and women from abuse; and brought to all kinds of sufferers both the compassion of Jesus and modern methods of medicine, reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation. Making truth present keeps us preaching the gospel till the end.

Conclusion

We learn from Jesus that commitment to truth requires personal commitment to Him. We are faithful to truth by making Christ truly present in our life and around us (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). The wise disciple is guided by "the Spirit of truth into all truth" (John 16:13). The power of Jesus' words is known in the doing of them. While Jesus is the Word of God *embodied*, we often satisfy ourselves with words rhetorically *embalmed*. More important than formulating the gospel in correct creed — and that is important — we should endeavor to embody it in glowing deed. Truth needs to become present.

My proposal is that instead of building on a restrictive notion of present truth as heritage, constructed on a concrete list of doctrines, we should build on the biblical notion of truth made present, rooted on the dynamics of divine wisdom. Instead of relating the concept of present truth mainly to a restrictive concept of God's remnant, resulting often in an exclusive mentality and a self-centered church, we should strive for making truth present, linking our missiology to justice and mercy, and not to numbers and results. Instead of restricting present truth to the apocalyptic realm only, we should explore a biblical theology of time, where the permanent essentials would permeate the urgent last-time expectations and where the *kairos* (the present opportunities) would inspire the way we prepare ourselves for the coming events of *kronos* (end time). Instead of a legalistic approach to God's law, we should deal with God's law as a living way of making truth present in our everyday life, a result of our covenant with God, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Thus, remaining "firmly established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12), we will be able to make truth really present in our lives and around us.

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Every town needs a carpenter

by John Wesley Taylor V
and Miriam Louise Taylor

Nazareth was lucky to have had in its midst a great Carpenter — one who shaped raw wood into beautiful furniture. But that Carpenter was so unique that He was able to turn the human heart from sin to righteousness, from folly to holiness, from citizens of a fleeting world to harbingers of glory to God's heavenly home. Every town needs a carpenter, but every heart needs the real Carpenter.

Zadok,* my friend! I am blessed to see you again. I feared that it might never be, for my days are now numbered. But when I heard that you had moved back from Crete and settled again in our old hometown, I sent my eldest, James, to bring you, so that we might confide in each other again, as we so often did as childhood friends.

It has brought me great joy to hear of your children. You, of course, remember my four eldest sons: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. They were but children the last time that we were together. Remember? It was on that last Passover before you were forced to flee from the City of David. With that vile Edomite on the throne, no one of the house of David could be safe, especially in the city of David. Just think of it! In better times, you or I might have rightly occupied the throne of David! Actually, that was one of the reasons my family had left Bethlehem and moved to Galilee.

It all began, as my grandfather Matham told me, when the Parthians invaded Judea. The holy city, Jerusalem, was taken and the temple plundered. Both Hyrcanus, the high priest, and Phasaël, tetrarch of Jerusalem, were taken captive. When Roman troops recaptured Jerusalem three years later, they placed “the great hero” on the throne. But what a miserable hero Herod was! To inaugurate his reign, he massacred 45 of the leading brethren and all of the members of the Sanhedrin, save one. No, with an avowed enemy of the Jewish nation in power, it was not a good time to be of royal blood!

Six years later, the great earthquake rocked the countryside, leaving thousands dead and whole villages destroyed. Then, after a breath of only a few years, the dreadful three-year famine descended upon us. Oh, how the people cried out for the Messiah to come! It would just inflame us how Herod would sit in his palace, surrounded by his 10

wives and sons and daughters, feasting and making merry, while the rest of the nation starved to death. And all the while, believing himself to be our Messiah. The thought was revolting!

The invasions, the earthquake, the famine, and that bloodthirsty Herod — it was just too much. My parents felt that we had to get away. So we moved to Galilee, along with several other families from our hometown. I was heartbroken that your family was staying behind. How I looked forward to those yearly visits to Jerusalem for the Passover. At least we could spend a few days together and remember the times when as lads we explored the hillsides surrounding Bethlehem.

I well remember the last year that we were together at the Passover. I was alone again, the dear wife of my youth having been laid to rest. And you were fearing for your life, and the lives of your wife and children. It seemed that Herod's jealousy knew

no limits. After all, he had now murdered one of his wives and her aged father, and two of his own sons. And he had also drowned Aristobulus, the high priest, in the royal pool at Jericho. No wonder the people referred to him as “Satan incarnate.” Behind closed doors, of course! No, it was not a good time to be living in Bethlehem.

Now, some thirty Passovers have gone by....

Zadok, I must also tell you of my life during these years. There have been many things upon my heart. Matters that I have told no one, for I feared that no one would understand. Now that life’s journey is nearly over, I will once more confide in you — for our hearts are one.

Betrothed to Mary

Some months after that last Passover, I became betrothed to a young woman of Nazareth, Mary, also of the house of David. You may remember the two sisters who used to come down each year to the Passover. Well, one of the two had married Cleophas, and I was engaged to be married to the other. We had taken our vows, and I had signed the document and paid the price of betrothal. Now, but twelve months must transpire before we married.

One day Mary came to see me. She told me that she had received news concerning her relatives in the hill country of Judea, and wished to go and visit them. I bid her Godspeed. She was away, though, for nearly three months.

On her return, Mary came to see me right away. She told me that she had stayed in Judea for so long because one of her relatives, Elizabeth, of the daughters of Aaron, had finally borne a son in her old age. It seems that her husband, Zacharias, was officiating at the temple. That week, the lot had fallen upon him to offer the incense at the morning and evening ser-

vices. As Zacharias was nearing 70 years of age, I am sure that it must have seemed to be the culminating moment.

As he was standing before the altar of incense offering up the prayers of the people, an angel suddenly appeared on the south side of the altar. The angel spoke to him, and told him that he would have a son, that he should call his name John, and that this child would become a mighty prophet. Now, the priest had indeed been praying for many years for a son, but long since had given up all hope. When he asked the angel how this could ever be, the angel, who said his name was Gabriel, replied that Zacharias would receive a sign: that he would not be able to hear nor speak until the child was born.

When Zacharias came out from the holy place to pronounce the benediction of Aaron, he could not speak a word. Moreover, his face shone like the face of an angel. It was all very mysterious, but quite wonderful. As you know, the benediction includes the words, “May the Lord make His face to shine upon you.” Well, it had happened that day.

Mary, however, knew nothing of this. Then one day the angel appeared to her here in Nazareth and told her that her relative, Elizabeth, was already six months with child. That is when Mary came to tell me that she wished to go and visit her extended family living in a city of Judah, south of Jerusalem toward Hebron. I was not aware, however, of the angel’s visit.

Mary stayed there until the child was born. When the friends and family wished to name the child after his father, Elizabeth told them that his name instead should be “John.” So they made signs to Zacharias, asking him what he wanted to name the child. The priest asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name shall be called John.” Immediately, Zacharias

regained his speech and hearing. It was all quite astounding!

Then Mary said something that left me dumbfounded. She told me that she was also pregnant, about three months along, in fact. She said that an angel had told her that she would have a child, and should call his name “Jesus,” and that God would give Him the throne of David forever.

I didn’t know what to say.... It was all so unexpected! One thing I knew for sure: this was not my child. As I thought about it, I came to the conclusion that the whole matter sounded just too strange. She was a sweet and pious girl, but nobody in their right mind would believe this. And I had my own children to think of. If I went ahead and took Mary as my wife, in the condition that she was in ... well, it would seem as an admission to everyone that I had not conducted myself with propriety. And how could I expect my sons to remain upright after their father had acquired such a reputation? It just didn’t seem to be worth it.

The best thing to do would be to send Mary away, back to her relatives in Judea, or wherever. I admit, it was a hard decision to make. I did care greatly for Mary, and decided to put her away privately, rather than put her through the embarrassment of a public trial.

That night as I slept, an angel appeared to me in a dream. He instructed me, “Do not be afraid about Mary. Go ahead and marry her. She’s still a virgin, despite what you may think. She was made pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. When the boy is born, I want you to name him Jesus.” And I awoke....

It suddenly struck me that I was to name him. As you know, the naming of the child has always been a paternal responsibility. His name was to be “Jesus: Jehovah is salvation.” For, the angel had said, he would save His

people from their sins. I didn't quite understand it all, but when God speaks, I will obey.

So on the morrow, I finalized arrangements to take Mary as my wife. And it was just as I had thought. You know how the rumor mills churn in these little towns. Worse still, there was really no one with whom I could talk....

The birth of Jesus

As the time drew near for Mary's delivery, suddenly all Palestine seemed to break into chaos. Caesar Augustus had ordered that a census be taken throughout the empire, and Herod decided that everyone in Palestine must report to their city of origin. Everyone was upset! As we rightly guessed, a new tax would not be long in coming.

With Mary, however, I was in a perplexing situation. Should I leave her here in Nazareth and register for both of us, as one was allowed to do? Or should I take her with me, so that we might be together at this important time?

I suppose that I shouldn't have worried about it, though, for Mary seemed to have already made up her mind that she would accompany me to Bethlehem.

The trip took us quite a few days, traveling through the Jordan valley. The highways were thronged with people! Finally, we made the climb to Jerusalem, and then pushed on to Bethlehem. Bethlehem: the city of Boaz, Jesse, and David, more than a thousand years ago. Bethlehem: the site, another thousand years before that, where Rachel had died and was buried, having given birth to her son Benjamin.

Wearily, we climbed the hill of Bethlehem. How we looked forward to finding lodging and getting some refreshing sleep. But it was not to be. The city was packed and overflowing. We inquired to see if any of our relatives still lived in town, but there

were none. Vainly, we traversed the entire street from the gate to the eastern extremity of town. At the boarding house, I inquired to see if there might still be a room. Perhaps if we had been wealthy and honorable, it might have been different, but we were clearly peasants, and from Galilee. So we were informed that there was no room.

The innkeeper, however, noticing my wife's condition, took pity on her and offered to let us stay out in the stable. It wasn't exactly what we had hoped for, spending the night in a rough place with the beasts, but ... it was the best that there was.

I spread clean hay on the floor, and we tried to make ourselves comfortable. And it was there that the baby was born.

We washed him up, rubbed him down with salt, and wrapped him in the swaddling cloths that Mary had brought along. I took one of the feeding troughs, and we made it into a cradle. I really wished that it could have been better. After all, it was her firstborn child, and I was a carpenter by trade. But Mary didn't seem to mind.

Toward morning, we heard shuffling feet outside. Peering into the darkness, I made out the forms of some men and young boys. Breathlessly, one of them informed me that they had come to see the baby. Quickly, they crowded in and surrounded the infant. They just stood there, gazing down.

I asked them how they knew that a baby had been born in the stable, and they all started talking at once!

It seems that they had been out on the plain, watching over their sheep, when they began to notice a strange glow in the sky. Suddenly, an angel stood before them. They were frightened beyond belief! But the angel told them, "Fear not, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." The angel then explained that

they would find this baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Suddenly, the angel was surrounded with a host of angels, praising God and exclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill, toward men." The plain lit up as if it were midday!

When the light from the angels faded away, the shepherds determined that they must find the child. They concluded that a baby lying in a manger would most likely be in the stable that belonged to the boarding house. After spending a few more moments with us, the shepherds departed, praising God.

Jesus' dedication

Once the census was over, Bethlehem returned again to its peace and tranquility. Mary and I talked it over, and decided that — at least for the time being — we would remain in Bethlehem.

Mary seemed to think that it might be best for Jesus to grow up in Bethlehem. I agreed that it was definitely a more reputable town than Nazareth. Furthermore, there seemed to be good prospects for setting up shop. As you know, every town needs a carpenter.

When Mary's days of purification were complete, we took the baby to the temple. There we must present Him to the Lord, pay the redemption of the firstborn, and offer the sacrifice.

We were in rather straight circumstances — what carpenter isn't! And so we brought two turtle doves, as the law provides for the poor.

After the blessing, as we were preparing to leave, an elderly man came up to us and asked if he might hold the child. His name was Simeon — you may remember him. He is the one to whom the Lord had promised that he would not die until his eyes had seen the Consolation of Israel.

He took the child in his arms

and began to praise God. Suddenly we became the center of attention. People began to gather around. Then out from among the crowd stepped Anna, the prophetess of the tribe of Asher, by then over 80 years old. She also glorified God, announcing to everyone that the Lord had sent the Redeemer.

As Simeon gave the child back to Mary, however, he spoke to her strangely, about this child bringing about the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and about a sword piercing her soul also. It was all quite mysterious.

Visit of the wise men

Back at the house in Bethlehem, however, everything seemed to be quite uneventful. Curious visitors had ceased to drop by; actually, nobody important had ever visited. I guess that the priests and rulers, if they heard about the child, didn't give the story much credence. That is, until one night nearly a year after the child's birth.

We had already retired, when we heard footsteps out in the street and a muffled conversation in front of our door. I arose to see who it might be. Imagine my surprise when I saw a number of richly-attired travelers, surrounded by their bodyguard. They told me that they had come to see the child, who had been born king of the Jews.

As they entered, I could see that these men were not Israelites, although they spoke our language quite well. They told me that they were scholars — magi from the East. They explained that they had been studying the ancient writings, and had found the prophecy of a Hebrew named Daniel, who had served in the court of Babylon. The prophecy, when interpreted, pointed to a notable event that should occur within their lifetime: the birth of a prince.

One night, as they studied the heavens, the sky seemed to glow with

a strange radiance. Near the western horizon, a new star appeared — a star more magnificent than any of the heavenly bodies. Upon consulting the writings, they discovered that one of their own wise men, a man by the name of Balaam, had centuries before spoken of a star which would arise out of Jacob. And that another Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, had described a deliverer who would be a “light to the Gentiles.”

They concluded that they should travel to Judea and render homage to this newly-born king of whom the ancients had spoken. As they traveled, the star had remained steadfastly in the west each night for several months, just above the horizon. As they approached Jerusalem, it appeared to hover just over the temple on Mount Moriah. Then it vanished.

In the city, however, no one seemed to be aware of the birth of a Hebrew prince. Indeed, when the magi inquired if anyone knew where they might find the king of the Jews, people would look the other way. As you know, it would have been foolish to have seemed too interested in a new “king of the Jews.” Herod had his spies everywhere! I can imagine, however, that the arrival of this group of rich and learned foreigners asking for the “king of the Jews” caused no small stir behind closed doors.

The wise men told me that they were about ready to give up in discouragement and return home, when a messenger arrived from Herod's palace. There, in a private interview, Herod asked them many questions about their mission, about when the star had appeared, and about what they thought it meant. Then he told them that the ancient prophets also foretold that the prince should be born in Bethlehem, and that they should search there diligently for the child.

The wise men departed from Jerusalem, most grateful to Herod

and hopeful once again. Night was falling as they left the city gates, and they again saw the star. This time, however, it lay toward the south, in the direction of Bethlehem. And that is how they ended up at our home.

Upon seeing the child, they bowed to the ground and worshipped Him. Then they brought out their gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. I could hardly believe my eyes — gifts, indeed, for a king! They stayed the remainder of that night at the boarding house. I gathered, from what they said, that they would be returning to Jerusalem on the morrow.

Early the next morning, however, they were gone. The innkeeper said that they had arisen before dawn with haste and had left town. I walked around in a bit of a daze that day. What did all this mean? What was I, a poor carpenter, to do with these royal gifts? Was anyone in town aware of what we had received? I lay down that night to a troubled sleep.

Flight to Egypt

As I slept, I dreamed that an angel suddenly appeared and commanded me, “Joseph, take the child and Mary, and flee into Egypt, and be there until I tell you. For Herod will attempt to destroy the child.”

I awoke in a cold sweat; it was all so very clear. If Herod had told the wise men to go to Bethlehem to search for the child, and if they had returned to Jerusalem, they would most assuredly inform him of their success. And Herod would tolerate no rival, infant or otherwise.

I awakened Mary. “We must leave immediately!” I whispered. Long before dawn, we were headed down the road to Hebron, then on to Beersheba, and finally into Egypt.

That was when Herod slew all of the infants two years old and under in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside. It seems that the wise men did not go back to Jerusalem, after all, but returned

to their country by another route. Herod was furious, sure that a plot was underway, and ordered the massacre. The ruthless old man! We had escaped, just in time....

Down in Egypt, the gifts of the magi were our principal means of support. In fact, I am not sure how we would have survived without them. Then one night the angel appeared to me again and told me that Herod was dead, and that it was safe to return to the land of Israel. We decided to return to Bethlehem at once. After all, what better place to raise the heir to David's throne?

But it was not to be. As we neared the borders of Judea, I began to pick up more details of what had taken place.

It seems that shortly before his death, Herod had murdered his own designated heir to the throne, Antipater. I don't know, a disagreement or something. I tell you, that despot Herod was sick!

Yes, indeed, it was a relief that the 34 scandalous years of Herod's reign were over. That is, until I heard who was the new ruler of Judea.

It seems that Herod had changed his mind once again just hours before his death, and divided his kingdom among three sons. As you know, Judea fell to Archelaus, his son by Malthace, the Samaritan. Now, not only was the Edomite hatred of the Jews coursing through our ruler's veins, but the bitterness of the Samaritans as well. Perhaps that is why he started off his reign with a mass murder of 3,000 Jews in the temple courtyard. I tell you, he was Herod all over again — only worse!

I just didn't know what to do. Should we try to settle in one of the other towns of Judea? Again the angel came to me and directed me to return to Nazareth.

The childhood of Jesus

So we came back to Galilee, to the land of Zebulun. To this little town

nestled among the hills. I know, this little village is not much to brag about. Indeed, Nazareth is quite notorious and despised — proverbial for its wickedness and licentiousness, even here in Galilee.

But at least Herod Antipas, the "fox" who rules Galilee, is less violent than his brother. I agree, he is rather vain and degenerate. I suppose that you heard how he discarded his wife, the princess from Petra, and is now living with his brother Philip's wife, Herodias.

Well, as I was saying, this town didn't really offer a lot, except that there had been no carpenter here since I had left. And, as you know, every town needs a carpenter. Although the humblest of trades, I have always been content, though obliged to live here in the poorest section of town. So I set up my shop again.

Jesus at the temple

Oh yes, there was one more event. It happened the year that the boy Jesus turned 12. For the first time, he would be able to attend the Passover. I remember how excited I was when I turned 12 and was counted as a son of Abraham, a son of the law.

We traveled down in a great company — with our friends from here in town and our relatives from over in Cana. It was quite a grand and festive affair.

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus spent most of the days at the temple, reflective. He seemed to be studying out some great problem. We never worried about him, though, for he was such a fine lad. Actually, we hoped that he might come in contact with some of the great teachers of Israel, perhaps even the honorable Gamaliel.

At the end of the week, before starting out for home, we went one final time to the temple for the morning blessing. After the ceremony, we left in great confusion. I had been talking with some of the

neighbors about the newly-appointed governor.

You see, the emperor Augustus had finally exiled Archelaus to Gaul the year before, and Judea had become a Roman province. Nothing like falling out of the kettle and into the fire! Roman centurions with their troops, new taxes, and patriots turned traitors as tax collectors.

You heard about the bloody tax revolt led by Judas of Galilee? Well, it had taken place that very year. And to top it all off, we now had a Roman governor in Jerusalem who insisted that he had the right to appoint and remove even the high priest. Intrigue, bribery, and assassination.... There was plenty to talk about! And, of course, Mary and the women were up ahead, as we usually traveled.

That evening, we had made it down to Jericho. As we started to set up camp, we suddenly realized that Jesus was not with us. At first, we thought that he might be with some of the other boys — you know how boys are. But he wasn't. Nor was he with any of our neighbors or kinsfolk. In fact, no one in the whole company had seen him since morning prayers.

We became frantic! Where was our son? Dark forebodings filled our hearts, and we reproached ourselves bitterly. The night seemed endless.... We were worried sick!

The next morning before daybreak, we scrambled back up the rocky road toward Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, we hurried to the place where we had stayed. Surely he would be there waiting for us. But he was not. We searched the streets from one end of the city to the other, and again spent a sleepless, agonizing night.

The following morning, we renewed our desperate search. About midmorning, we saw people gathering in one of the temple courtyards. As we neared the edge of the crowd, we suddenly heard his voice. We

pressed into the crowd and caught a glimpse of him. It nearly took our breath away. There he was, surrounded by the most learned teachers of Israel, asking and answering questions.

I didn't know the boy had it in him! The questions that he asked, the answers that he gave ... even the doctors of the law seemed stunned.

Finally, Mary got up the courage to tell one of the rabbis in the outer circle that we were his parents and desired to speak with him. Presently, during a pause in the conversation, they informed Jesus that we were there. Obedient as always, he pressed through the crowd toward us.

Once we were by ourselves, Mary addressed Jesus, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have sought you sorrowing these three days."

He looked at her lovingly and said, "How is it that you sought me? Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business?"

We were dumbfounded! Jesus had just disclaimed me as his father. I mean, it was obvious that Jesus was not talking about me — my business was back in Nazareth.

Mary just couldn't understand. We had told Jesus about the visit of the shepherds, about the wise men, and the flight to Egypt. But we had never told him that I was not his father. In fact, everyone assumed that I was — although a bit remiss in propriety, as it was rumored around. But how did he know?

Back in Nazareth

Since we arrived back home, though, things have been quite as usual. Well, there have been a few delicate moments — like when the rabbis came and tried to have us enroll Jesus in the synagogue school. Something about the fact that while Jesus might know the Scriptures, he didn't understand the importance of the traditions of the elders.

Jesus, however, didn't seem interested. He replied that we must obey God rather than men. That, of course, did not set too well with the delegation, and Jesus, in fact, has never attended the rabbinical schools. He just reads the scrolls of the prophets in the evening and spends the early morning hours out on the hillsides. It's really amazing, the ideas that he comes up with, after he has been out there alone.

After the rabbis came, my own sons began to find fault with Jesus, particularly because he would not abide by all the rules of the scribes and Pharisees. He never became upset, though. He just kept saying that we must follow all the words of the Lord, and not the traditions of men.

Actually, I think that the problem was not just about the phylacteries or the rabbinical ceremonies. My sons were irritated because Jesus would not take part in some of their activities. Well, my older sons haven't always been spotless. Jesus, however, always seemed to have such a keen discrimination between right and wrong.

Son of the carpenter

Yes, Jesus has been a good son, obedient and honorable. Every Sabbath, he is in the synagogue. And every day during the week, he works in the carpentry shop and helps support the family.

In fact, of all of my sons, he is really the finest carpenter. He is careful, faithful, and hard-working. His work is outstanding — well-designed, with the parts fitting exactly. And he is always willing to learn. I truly believe that he will be a master craftsman.

Not only that, but he seems to truly love people. He always has a kind word, a comforting touch, a cheerful smile. In fact, he will do a job for free when someone is too poor to pay. I just wish that there were more people like him.

Yes, every town needs a carpenter.

But my days as the carpenter are over now. God knows that I tried my best. That I have tried to follow the law with all my heart. Even when life turned out so differently from what I had planned.

As for Jesus, well, things seem to have returned to normal. No more heavenly messengers, no more startling events. I guess that I am just not sure what it was all about.

In my heart, although I have never told anyone besides Mary, I believe that he is the Messiah. But I don't understand how he will ever sit on the throne of David.

They say that his cousin John, the one who was to be the prophet, is living a reclusive life out in the desert of Judea.

Sometimes I just don't understand the acts of God. But I guess that I don't need to understand everything. Only remain loyal to the God of Abraham.

Yes, Zadok, Jesus will be a good carpenter for Nazareth. A good carpenter....

Every town needs a good carpenter.

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*The presence of Zadok is used as a literary device.

Who do you say that I am?

by Marilyn Scott

By addressing the question of all time to the disciples, Jesus wanted to draw out from us the redemptive answer He sought: a confession that was crucial to discipleship.

“Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do men say that I am?’ So they answered, ‘John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ’” (Mark 8:27-29 NKJV)¹

This dialogue between Jesus and His disciples takes place while Jesus is active — teaching, preaching, and healing throughout the towns and villages of Galilee. More and more people were hearing about Jesus and following Him. His ministry was marked by many miracles: turning water into wine, restoring sight to the blind, cleansing the lepers, feeding multitudes, casting unclean spirits, raising the dead, calming storms, and many other miracles. The religious leaders were suspiciously watching and scheming. The disciples were witnesses to Jesus’ mighty works and His divine authority and power. The whole of Galilee seemed to be astir. Against the rising popularity of Jesus, the Master asked the question that confronts every age and every person: who is Jesus? This is perhaps the greatest question of history.

Matthew 16:13-20 and Luke 9:18-20 also report this incident, with slight variations and additional details. In reviewing all three reports, I find an intriguing scenario.² Why would Jesus ask this question specifically here? Did He really care what people thought of Him? Was this really His intent here? What was He trying to achieve by probing His disciples on what was being said about Him, or more directly, what the disciples thought about Him?

The incidence occurs in Caesarea Philippi: a predominantly Gentile city several miles northeast of Galilee, known for its worship of multiple gods and goddesses — a fitting place for Jesus to be declared the Son of God.³ He has been rejected in His own hometown of Nazareth. He has to redirect His ministry to other regions, because His own people refuse to accept Him and His claim as the Messiah. And wherever He goes, His acceptance is matched by rejection, the chief concern being that of the religious leaders of the time — the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who sought every possible means to get rid of Jesus (Luke 4:29). As their plot thickens, they keep track of Jesus’ whereabouts continuously, observing His teach-

ings and actions, seeking a word here or an action there that could be used against Him as a lawbreaker, sufficient to warrant the end of His life and ministry.

Thus, on the one hand there is Jesus’ increasing popularity amidst the common people, and on the other, increasing suspicion and plotting by the Pharisees and Sadducees to do away with Him. Against this conflicting background, Jesus takes His inner circle, His disciples, aside and confronts them with history’s momentous question: Who do people say I am? Who do *you* say I am?

By addressing the question to the disciples, Jesus wanted to draw out from them the redemptive answer He sought: a confession that was crucial to discipleship. Jesus was probing to see what the disciples had heard and observed and what they believed. First, Jesus was inquiring to know the opinion of the people: who they thought He was. Second, Jesus wanted to know the disciples’ own understanding of the issues involved in the question.

Confession of the individual

The disciples first chose to answer the easier part: the response of others to the identity of Jesus and His mission. Three popular answers were

suggested, and each one of them was true, easy, and would not get anyone into trouble. From the immediate past to the distant historic archives, the disciples chose three persons with whom people identified Jesus. Was He the Baptist, risen from the dead, to confront an evil generation with a Messianic message of repentance, reformation, and salvation? Or was He Elijah the prophet, who was expected to return to God's people with his judgment of fire against the Jezebels of today and inaugurate the expected kingdom of promise and peace? Or was He Jeremiah, another such prophet, set out to open the high way of God and inaugurate a new day of reformation?

Then as now, Jesus was more interested in the confession of the individual. Peter was quick to grasp the importance of the personal nature of the question. Did he become the self-appointed representative of the disciples? We do not know, but his response knew no hesitation: "You are the Christ." Matthew and Luke refer to Peter's response as "the Son of the living God" and "the Christ of God," respectively.

The disciples had plenty of evidence to believe and agreed that Jesus was the Christ — the Messiah. They had heard His authoritative words and had seen His deeds, performing great and powerful miracles. They had seen Him working as the Messiah — the "Anointed One" — preaching the gospel to the poor, proclaiming the kingdom to everyone, and calling all to repentance. They recognized Jesus as a king and ruler — the one who was to come as foretold in the Scripture — and did not stop the crowds from crowning Him as king after the feeding of the 5,000. But at this junction in Caesarea Philippi, they could not quite comprehend the probing nature of His question.⁴

The scenario has some important assumptions. The disciples, religious

leaders, and many of the people had varying expectations of Jesus, and because of these they misunderstood His role. Most expected Jesus to be a stern, powerful ruler, about to overthrow the Roman bondage and establish the Messianic kingdom. They expected Jesus, the Messiah, to take His rightful place in His kingdom. Clearly, they were thinking of an established earthly kingdom. But the kingdom of which Jesus spoke was a different kingdom; it was the kingdom of salvation — a kingdom not of this world. Jesus' role was "not to conquer but to suffer and die as the Servant of the Lord — an atoning sacrifice for sins."⁵

Jesus was pleased and relieved that at least Peter recognized Him as the Messiah, although human portrayals could never fully describe Jesus Christ. "Right you are," Jesus responded. I can imagine Peter feeling proud for giving the correct answer. However, Peter did not truly understand what was taking place, because at a later time, in Matthew's account, Jesus rebuked Peter for disagreeing with the prediction of His own death (Matthew 16:23).

Preparing the disciples

Reading further into Mark's account, we realize that Jesus was preparing the disciples for the events that were to come in the very near future. Jesus warned them, "The Son of Man must be rejected and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life." This is the first time the disciples heard Jesus predicting the coming events of His life. Jesus spoke plainly and clearly about His death and resurrection, telling them three times that He would soon die (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34). He alerted the disciples to His impending death, with that being the turning point of His entire ministry.⁶ Additionally,

in other instances, Jesus taught the disciples that the cost of discipleship was one of suffering and sacrifice (8:33-38; 9:35-37; 10:42-45).⁷

The incident concluded with another warning to the disciples. Jesus cautioned them to refrain from telling anyone about their discussion. This is strange! Why would He make such a request? Perhaps because Jesus realized that although the disciples had been with Him and had been witnesses to His works, they still did not fully comprehend His ministry. More teaching needed to take place. If the disciples, who had been with Jesus, did not understand His role fully, then others were likely to misunderstand His person and work as well. They were not quite ready to understand the predictions Jesus made concerning His impending death. It was not until His death and resurrection occurred that the disciples and many others would come to believe and understand what He had come to do and what He was ultimately trying to prepare them for.

Personal reflections

As I reflect on this incident at Caesarea Philippi, I continue to think about how we would answer Jesus' question today: "Who do you say that I am?" Is this question important today? Most definitely it is! The answer to the question would depend on how well we know Jesus. Do we know who Jesus is? "It is not enough to know what others say about Jesus: You must know, understand, and accept for yourself that He is the Messiah. You must move from curiosity to commitment, from admiration to adoration."⁸

Through careful study of God's word, I know that when Jesus asks a question, He also provides the answer. He does not leave anything to chance. He is clear and direct. We should never be confused or unsure of Jesus' identity. We can know Jesus

through the power of His work in our lives, by intimate communion and personal time with Him, and thorough study and application of His word. Throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, we find what we need to know about Jesus and the Father.

Thus, the eternal question Jesus posed at Caesarea Philippi stares at every generation, demanding an answer. Not what others think of Jesus, but what I personally think of Him, and how I relate to His call, claims, and demands. Through the assertive words of Jesus, I hear Him saying to me and to every Christian receptive to hear His words: “What do you know about Me? I am counting on you to tell and share with others. I am the salvation to this world and you are the ‘link’ to help those that do not know Me and are not prepared for My return.”

The answer to the question “What do you think of me?” is not found in one’s knowledge of history or philosophy, but in one’s personal commitment to Jesus. Says William Barclay: “Our knowledge of Jesus must never be at second hand. We might know every verdict ever passed on Jesus; we might know every Christology that human minds have ever thought out; we might be able to give a competent summary of the teaching about Jesus of every great thinker and theologian — and still not be Christians. Christianity never consists in *knowing about* Jesus; it always consists in knowing Jesus. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict. He did not ask only Peter, he asks every one of us: ‘You — what do you think of me?’”

Our response can be neither philosophical nor sociological. We do not have the option to deal with Jesus as a great teacher, as an ethicist, or a radical reformer. Our answer must be profoundly personal, focused on our need for abiding in Jesus and Him alone. That journey of abiding in Jesus is neither easy nor

temporary. “The Christian life is not a paved road to wealth and ease...”; oftentimes, it involves hard work, oppression, denial, and deep suffering.¹⁰ We will have challenges, just as the disciples did. In the end, though, we know Jesus is with us always and will not leave us.

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PROFILE

Edino Biaggi

Dialogue with an Adventist musician from Argentina

Interview by Rubén Sanchez



Born and raised in an Argentinian family of Adventist leaders, world-class oboe performer Edino Biaggi started his career as a musician at the age of nine with a concert tour around Argentina. This is nothing extraordinary for his family, since Biaggi's grand-uncle is the legendary Argentinean tango composer, pianist, and bandleader Rodolfo "Wizard Hands" Biaggi (1906-1969).

Using the talents God gave him and taking advantage of resources in his family, Biaggi studied music theory and woodwind performance from a very early age. Good training and hard work opened the doors of several South American orchestras, and he was offered the principal oboe chair at two prestigious youth orchestras in the late 90s. He declined both offers because of Sabbath conflicts.

But doors opened at Roosevelt University in Chicago, where Biaggi obtained a scholarship and completed his bachelor's degree in oboe performance. While at the university, he was trained by Alex Klein, Grammy award-winner and former principal oboe with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Biaggi is the recipient of several music awards, and has been featured as a soloist in the United States and Europe, with his perfor-

mances broadcast on several radio and TV stations (including 3ABN). He finished his master's degree in oboe performance at Queens College, New York, in 2008, and completed his artist diploma certificate last year. Biaggi currently teaches in two colleges of the City University of New York.

■ *Not everybody has such an important musician in the family as your great-uncle. Was he an Adventist?*

No. As a composer and performer, he had a lifelong passion for music. For three decades, beginning in the 40s, he was well known and admired for his role as a tango player, pianist, and composer. He had a very unique style that many upcoming musicians try to imitate even today.

■ *Was he the only musician in your family?*

My father was a very good baritone. He played the piano and wanted to be a conductor. But his parents did not support him, because for them, music was no more than a hobby. My grandfather was an Adventist, and he believed that good Adventists cannot be musicians and musicians cannot be good Adventists. That kind of philosophy may turn out to be true, as it almost did in my experience.

My mother, who taught me how to draw my first musical notes and encouraged me in music, was quite influential in my musical interests. Many times as a child I wanted to quit music and would evade practice, but my mother was patient and persisted. She encouraged me, motivated, and guided me through those difficult days.

■ *When did you first experience a conflict between your faith and the professional world of music?*

In the late 90s, the conductor of the Mercosur Youth Symphony Orchestra, one of South America's most important youth orchestras, personally called and offered me the principal oboe chair. What an honor! And how exciting! But when I shared with the conductor my belief about the Sabbath, he had to take back his invitation.

■ *I am sorry to hear that. For a young man with your talent, though, I am sure you had other opportunities. In other words, we believe where a door closes, God opens a window. Was that the case?*

After that episode, I auditioned for the principal oboe chair at the Academic Orchestra of the Colon Theatre, the best youth orchestra in

Argentina, and I won that position. Since I knew Sabbath would be an issue, I called the conductor, hoping we could work something out. I was very excited about this opportunity, because the orchestra was about to leave for a tour in Europe. With a prayer in my heart, I explained my religious beliefs to him, and right away, he told me there was nothing he could do. He fired me during that very same phone call.

■ *Were you tempted to leave the faith right at that moment?*

God did open a window. I migrated to Chicago, on a full-tuition scholarship, to study oboe performance at Roosevelt University. The scholarship covered my tuition. But to care for my housing, food, books, and other expenses, I played at different venues and events, such as weddings, funerals, and receptions. I also played for the local Catholic and Lutheran churches in exchange for some compensation. But still, like many students, I always had a very low balance in my bank account. I also played in Adventist churches almost every Sabbath, but with no



compensation, since as Adventists we should not work on Sabbath.

■ *Did you ever ask Adventist churches for compensation?*

No. I believe it is my duty as a member to offer my talents to the Lord and the church. However, as a student short on funds, monetary help as a student aid — and not as payment for my playing — would have been very much appreciated. I was invited to play almost every Sabbath by different Adventist churches. Some of these churches were an hour away from my room, and to get around was quite expensive, so I had to restrict myself to playing in churches nearby.

■ *It looks as though we, as a church, did not support enough...*

Our church does appreciate music, but the level of music in most churches is not very high. When we find especially talented people, we need to encourage them, and if need be support them to reach higher levels of music. Our church does not always seem ready to help those members who aspire to be professional musicians to get to the top.

■ *But we still want the best music when we do evangelistic campaigns, right?*

That's right. Effective preaching and good music go together, especially in evangelistic campaigns. We have many eloquent preachers, but we do not have many world-class musicians. Yet music prepares the hearts that will later receive the Word of God, and it would be good for the church as a whole, both in local ministry and in evangelism, to have an intentional program to train, foster, and support good musicians.

■ *Back to your days in Chicago. Is there any one thing in particular that you remember about your struggle to study and to maintain yourself financially?*

At one time, my financial resources were very low. A friend and I decided to do something novel. We went to train stations in Chicago's upscale neighborhoods and played for commuters. We started around 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning and played for about five hours every day. One summer, I did that almost every day, and after lunch I worked in a fertilizer factory. That summer, I saved enough money to cover my expenses for one year.

■ *What did your music teachers say about you playing in train stations to make a living?*

My oboe teacher in Chicago had been an Adventist while trying to make his way in the music world. He went through some struggles with the Sabbath and with his faith, and finally he gave up Adventism. Because of that, he could understand my struggles very well and always supported me. He encouraged me, even though he had changed his mind about Sabbath-keeping. He never imposed his point of view on me, and he supported my view that Sabbath should be honored.

■ *I heard that your teacher won the 2002 Grammy award for best instrumental soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Did he tell you if that would have been possible as an Adventist?*

He shared his life experience as an Adventist and musician with me. He told me what once a very famous conductor told him: you are either in the right religion and in the wrong profession, or in the right profession and in the wrong religion. My Adventist grandfather used to tell me more or less the same.

■ *Is it truly that hard to work in the music industry as an Adventist?*

In our current world, it is already very hard to succeed as classical musicians. If we add the Adventist

component to the equation of becoming a classical musician, the path becomes twice as hard.

■ *Tell us about your family. What do they say about such spiritual struggles?*

Several members of my family are pastors and hold important positions. My grandfather worked for the South American Adventist Publishing House as an accountant for many years. When I went through spiritual hardships, I talked to my family and other pastors. They were very understanding and supportive. They told me that if I remained faithful, God would reward me.

■ *Since you did your part, do you think God did His?*

I think God has rewarded me with teaching positions here in New York City University. I got this job right out of school. God has also blessed me with an interesting music business that I developed: a double-reed production and distribution company.

■ *How do you feel about having trained all your life to perform oboe and not being able to do it in orchestral settings?*

I always wanted to be a performer, and that is what my heart wants. When I see how some of my friends have become principal chairs in famous orchestras, I know I could have done just as well as them. Nevertheless, because of my religious beliefs, I could never get that far in the orchestral world. That really hurts as a performer.

■ *Do you still hope you will find an orchestra that allows you to keep the Sabbath?*

Yes, but I do not see how it will happen. For instance, last year I auditioned for the English horn chair at the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Not everybody can audition for such a position; only those who have been personally invited can.

As in every other audition, I gave my best, and as in every other audition, an inner voice kept telling me, “What are you going to do if you win this audition?”

■ *I imagine that when you pray to God, you talk to Him about your struggles with music and faith...*

Yes, and it is not easy. I close my eyes, and I hope God will help me understand why I am in this struggle between music and faith for so long. I very much trust that God is going to give what is best for me. I know it is a matter of faith. So, honestly, sometimes I feel better about it, and sometimes I don't feel that good. One thing I am sure: I would never compromise my faith.

■ *What do you say to God?*

Sometimes I ask him why He would give me this talent if I may never be able to develop it to its full extent. For me, it is like God is giving you a first-class luxury car, and at the same time demanding from you that you keep it in the garage all the time, without driving. I feel like God has helped me have such a powerful car, but still wants me to ride a bicycle everywhere I go. So I pray, and I hope He will show me the way.

■ *What do you imagine yourself doing in heaven?*

With some musician friends, I sometimes make a joke: I studied so much music on earth that in heaven I will just have to refine a few details. Jokes aside, I hope I can do something connected to my profession here. In any case, I guess that won't matter anymore. It is true, however, that my piece of heaven on earth is when I play music. There is this brilliant quote by the music composer and critic Virgil Thomson: “I've never known a musician who regretted being one. Whatever deceptions life may have in store for you, music itself is not going to let you down.”

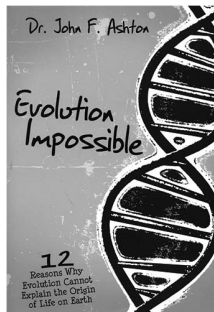
Music is like a safe haven for me. Relationships in this world are made and destroyed. But music, like God, is a refuge. I only wish I could find a way to make them both compatible in my life.

■ *What counsel would you give to young people with similar struggles in the pursuit of their career goals — maybe in music, teaching, medicine, law, or any other field?*

I believe I'm still a work in progress. I ask God to show me the way to go, every day. I am very thankful to Him, because I can make a living from doing what I love: music. I know very well that many people just cannot do what they love. They need to choose to either follow their dreams or get a “real” job. I believe with God's help we can achieve things we never imagined we could. The key is to put everything in God's hands, and ask Him to give what is best for us, not only in our careers, but in every aspect of our lives. I believe that God needs good men and women in all fields and careers, and He really wants us to go far and succeed in life. For that, we should always put God first, and never compromise our faith.

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BOOKS



Evolution Impossible: 12 Reasons Why Evolution Cannot Explain the Origin of Life on Earth
by John F. Ashton (Green Forest, Arizona: Master Books, 2012; 193 pages, paperback).

Reviewed by Suzanne Phillips

John Ashton's latest book, *Evolution Impossible*, is an explorative, yet concise, compilation of evidence from multiple areas of science that stand in opposition to the claims of evolution on origins. The data presented, the organization, and the readability of this book make it highly recommendable to the scientist and informed layman alike.

Ashton begins his book by addressing the possibility that, contrary to popular opinion, there are scientists who don't believe in the theory of evolution. Testimony from scientific researchers and professors is presented to show that intelligent, critically-thinking individuals, highly educated in their respective scientific fields, question the validity of evolutionary origins. From this platform, and from his own scientific and religious experience, Ashton begins his critical analysis of the evolutionary model. As an introduction, he prepares the reader to follow his arguments by first presenting the basic tenets of evolution.

The data presented come from two general fields of study: genomics/proteomics, and geology, with the majority of chapters spent evaluating geology. Molecular biology is considered first. The origin of information present within the cell and the probability of random events producing informational molecules are analyzed. He takes the reader step by step through genetic and biochemical data to show that physical and scientific data themselves preclude the evolutionary model as a possible explanation of origins.

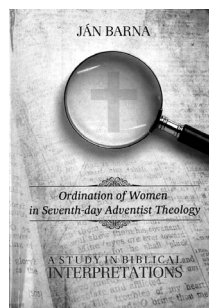
As for geological data, Ashton encourages the reader to recognize the data as they are, instead of allowing traditional interpretations to stand in the place of critical thinking. He first points out that the fossil record is a record of extinction, and not evolution, by highlighting the general absence of intermediate forms between species. He also points to evidence for catastrophic burial that is consistent with a worldwide flood. He asserts that rates of sedimentation and erosion directly contradict the prevalent old-life theory for the earth. Next, he evaluates radiometric dating, including its assumptions and potential problems. Radiometric dating is one of the biggest challenges to

short-age theories and is used as a major support of evolutionary origins and speciation. Overall, the reader is led to the conclusion that the theory of evolution and naturalism fails to account for all of the scientific data available in the fields of molecular biology and geology.

In addition to the scientific data, Ashton includes a brief look at two historical lines of evidence that support biblical theories: the large number of ancient cultures with flood stories, and the overwhelming testimony of individuals who have experienced supernatural occurrences in their lives.

Ashton gathers together — in a single, easy-to-comprehend format — the numerous scientific findings that contradict an evolutionary/long-age model. He emphasizes these points as pivotal arguments in the scientific defense of a biblical worldview. The book is not a rebuttal of the scientific findings that evolutionists claim as their own to support their theory; instead, Ashton approaches the debate from a more defensible perspective by pointing out that many already-accepted scientific facts could not be true if evolution was responsible for life on earth.

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Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Theology: A Study in Biblical Interpretations
by Ján Barna (Belgrade: Preporod, 2012; 359 pages; paperback).

Reviewed by Daniel Duda

Ján Barna is a senior lecturer in systematic and biblical theology at Newbold College of Higher Education in the United Kingdom. This book is a slightly revised version of his Ph.D. dissertation, submitted to Trinity College (Bristol) and the University of Bristol in November 2009.

The book does not specify the intended readership. Being a Ph.D. dissertation, it is obviously not a beach read, but any reader knowledgeable in theological issues and in the ongoing debate about ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church can appreciate the book and profit from it.

A plethora of materials, articles, books, and even some doctoral dissertations on women's ordination has been produced in the church over the last 30 to 40 years. Other studies have researched the issue of ordination of women in Adventism from an exegetical and theological perspective. Yet, Ján Barna's study is the first attempt to produce a comprehensive systematic analysis and synthesis of not only the biblical and theological aspects but also the hermeneutical (interpretative) stance of the ongoing debate about the role of women in Adventist theology and praxis.

The book has four chapters in addition to an introduction, summary, and conclusion. The introduction defines the basic goals of the study and provides a literature overview. The first chapter deals with a historical framework of the issue and reviews subsequent historical and ecclesiastical developments. The second and third chapters are mirror images that analyze and synthesize first opponents and then proponents of women's ordination and their biblical, theological, and hermeneutical positions. The main focus is given to the hermeneutical rationale of each side: How does each side arrive at their conclusion? Which presuppositions shape their view of the text, making them interpret it the way they do? The fourth chapter is the most important. It takes the hermeneutical conclusions of the two preceding chapters and assesses them from a meta-hermeneutical level, providing an insight into the operation of the Adventist hermeneutical mindset in the larger context of biblical interpretation today. The summary and conclusion summarize all the major findings of the book.

Since both sides argue that they use only the Bible to arrive at their conclusions, one needs to ask what governs their perspective(s) when reading the Bible. How come both sides arrive at a different conclusion, yet claim that they read the same Bible? The favorite argument for both sides is: we stand for what the Bible teaches!

Barna shows that both sides operate within text-centered intentionalism and use two-step text-application methodology: the rules and principles approach. Even the proponents of women's ordination do not usually deviate from this approach, except for some studies displaying similarities with feminist hermeneutical methods. However, what people see, and the conclusions they arrive at are based on their presuppositions, filters, etc., which influence the way the Bible is read. Barna argues that the reader's horizon and presuppositions are not even considered in the women's ordination debate since it is assumed that "every sane and unbiased person of common sense could and must perceive the same things" (p. 290). In such a model, people either completely reject (opponents) or partially reject (proponents) the reader's perspective.

However, proper hermeneutics must relate to both the text and the interpreter. Both sides devise strategies that concentrate on one side of the hermeneutical problem:

the text. The disagreement about the conclusion (women's ordination) springs not only from exegetical or theological conclusions, but also from prior disagreements about the nature of interpretation. The commonsense orientation of the opponents leads to a literalistic, direct reading of the meaning of the text. The more scientific rationalist orientation of proponents leads to principle-based hermeneutics. Both are thought to be the guarantee of discovering universal principles, but actually both either reject or neglect the problems of the reader's perspective. If they paid attention to the reader's perspective, it might have opened the awareness of both the opponents and proponents to the problem of the function of language, meaning, and the reader's pre-understanding, which are part of one's hermeneutical reality, regardless of whether one knows about them or not (p. 318).

Barna's study is a valuable resource for all who are interested in the question of Bible interpretation today. Bertil Wiklander, president of the Trans-European Division, says of the book that it "deserves to become a milestone" in contemporary Adventist theology, and in the life, faith, and practice of the Adventist church (p. iii). Though it is not the easiest read, or cheapest (\$35/£22), the book will reward a careful reader with an enhanced understanding of this particular issue in Adventism and of the biblical interpretation process in general.

The book will enhance the reader's understanding of the driving factors of the current debate: the underlying philosophical assumptions, the role the biblical text plays, the reader's perspective, the hermeneutical theory, and the whole process of coming to conclusions. All pastors, leaders, and interested lay people will benefit from this volume. The labor of ploughing through its pages with an engaged mind will be rewarded by opening much-needed new perspectives. The 40 pages of bibliographical references (pp. 319-359) are priceless for anyone who is serious about understanding this hot issue in more depth.

One criticism that can be made about the book is that it points the direction but does not provide a detailed solution to the problem. But the nature and extent of the study — a doctoral dissertation — does not permit that. We need to wait for another book by Dr. Barna or someone else.

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What have they seen?

by Ruth Hernandez Vital

In a moment of self-pride, we can miss an opportunity of a lifetime. Where we are, why we are, and who we are must all reflect God's eternal purposes in life — and not our fleeting wishes.

Amidst the ups and downs of the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah, in the ebb and flow of the history of Israel after Solomon, kings rose and kings fell. Some were evil, yet not completely evil; some were good, yet not totally so. Some were totally evil, leaving no room for God to work. Others were good, but not fully so. Saga after royal saga is contoured by what the kings did in terms of loyalty to God, keeping away from paganism and idolatry, and doing or not doing that which was right in the eyes of God.

In this parade of kings, at a momentous point in Israel's moral history, after serial failures of king after king who did evil, a new king suddenly appears on the scene who "did right" in the sight of God. Incredible! You can read about it in 2 Chronicles 29 and in 2 Kings 18.

How did Hezekiah do what was right? His father clearly was not righteous. Perhaps he had a godly mother — after all, she was a daughter of priests. But perhaps, even more importantly, Hezekiah made some important decisions as a young man that changed the course of his life. The book of 2 Kings mentions great accomplishments: regaining much of the kingdom's territory

and riches that had been lost, and liberating Judah from the tyranny of foreign powers that had made it a tributary. Even more significantly, Hezekiah restored the true worship of God, destroying the idols and their altars that dotted the nation. He even destroyed the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the desert (Numbers 21:8-9), because by this time people were burning incense and worshipping it (2 Kings 18:4). Truly, Hezekiah accomplished great things and "there was great joy in Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 30:26).

When things were going well for the king, a prophet enters the story. Isaiah had access to the king, whom he often visited with messages from God. On one occasion, for example, Hezekiah came to the temple completely distraught because the Assyrians were marching against him with an army of 185,000 and threatening to overwhelm Judah. At such a perilous time, Hezekiah turned to the temple to pray and await God's word. And the word came through Isaiah. His message was simple and direct: "Do not be afraid" (2 Kings 19:6). Everything turned out all right.

Sometime thereafter, Hezekiah fell sick. The news this time was not good. "Set your house in order,"

Isaiah warned, "because you will die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah began to weep like a child. "Oh, God, remember all the wonderful things that I have done!" As if God should need to be reminded! Incredibly, before Isaiah had left the middle court, God answered Hezekiah, "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you ... and I will add fifteen years to your life" (verses 5-6).

So God had spoken. But Hezekiah wanted further assurance: "Can't I have a sign that God will heal me?" Isaiah replied, "Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?" Now Hezekiah may have been ill, but he wasn't dumb. "It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps," the king said to himself, and asked the prophet to have the shadow go back ten steps. And so it happened.

Hezekiah's illness and healing became front-page news, and why shouldn't it! After all, in addition to the king's illness, there was the unheard of and the unexplainable: the miracle of the shadow in reverse gear. Even the kings of distant nations were impressed. One of them, Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, sent emissaries with letters and a gift.

“Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses — the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil — his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them” (verse 13). And the Babylonians returned home with great news, but not a word about the One who causes and bestows good news.

Isaiah re-enters the scene. “What did those men say, and where did they come from?” “Oh, they came from a distant land,” Hezekiah replied. “From Babylon.” “What did they see?” Isaiah asked. “Well, everything!” Hezekiah exclaimed. “There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.”

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD” (verses 16-17).

Reading that prophetic rebuke causes a certain indignation. Why didn’t Isaiah come ahead of time, to instruct Hezekiah how best to relate to the Babylonians? Why did he wait until after they had left? Why didn’t Isaiah say, “Hezekiah, some Babylonians are coming. I know that sometimes you are proud and a bit haughty, but don’t go showing off your treasure. That would be very dangerous!” Why didn’t Isaiah *warn* him?

The answer is found in 2 Chronicles 32. After recounting all of the great accomplishments of King Hezekiah, beginning in verse 23, the chronicler refers to the king’s illness and that a miracle took place, although the precise nature of that miracle is not specified. So why didn’t Isaiah forewarn Hezekiah about the visit? Verse 31 clarifies, “But when envoys were sent

by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.”

The Babylonian princes came to learn more about the wonderful works of God, but King Hezekiah showed them his own works, his treasure, and his accomplishments. And one of the Babylonian visitors took careful notes. The Babylonians would return a later day to enrich themselves with the treasures of Jerusalem!

Hezekiah, in one moment of self and pride, missed an opportunity of a lifetime. “The visit of these messengers from the ruler of a faraway land gave Hezekiah an opportunity to extol the living God. How easy it would have been for him to tell them of God, the upholder of all created things, through whose favor his own life had been spared when all other hope had fled! What momentous transformations might have taken place had these seekers after truth from the plains of Chaldea been led to acknowledge the supreme sovereignty of the living God!”¹

I have the privilege of working at Montemorelos University in Mexico. Some years ago, a national accrediting body sent a committee to review the School of Medicine for its initial accreditation. A number of the faculty and students were worried. After all, there were other schools of medicine in the country that were larger, and had more imposing structures and perhaps better-equipped laboratories. What should we show them? Then someone said, “This visit isn’t about us. It is about God. More than anything else, we want them to see our God.”

Now, that didn’t mean that we didn’t work hard to prepare the required documentation, or to make sure that the facilities were the best that we could have. Academic excellence was important, and so were high-quality clinical experiences. But

it was a matter of our priorities.

What did they see? Their own words told the story. “This is incredible! We have never seen anything like this anywhere else! These students are different. The teachers are different. You seem to have a purpose that goes beyond yourselves, a moral framework that guides your lives, a commitment to love and to serve.”

What did they see? Not the facilities, nor the equipment. They saw God reflected in the lives of His children.

What will others see in your house? What will they see in your life? Will they listen to a litany of your accomplishments? Will they see your trophies and acquisitions? Or will they see the life-changing power of God?

Ruth Hernandez Vital (Ph.D., Montemorelos University) is associate academic vice-president at Montemorelos University. She may be contacted at ruth-rhv@um.edu.mx.

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ACTION REPORT

Adventist students at Gulu University hold evangelistic meetings

by Charles Mutazindwa

Gulu University is a recently-established public university in Northern Uganda. For more than 20 years, the region was the epicenter of the infamous Lord's Resistance Movement, which brought war and much suffering to the area, with young people not having any educational opportunity.

With the war over and with peace returning to the region, the Ugandan government established a public university some 12 years ago, by upgrading a teacher-training college in the town of Gulu. The university is still small, with between 800 and 1,000 students. The university has about 40 Seventh-day Adventist students pursuing degree programs in various fields, including education, medicine, engineering, and commerce. The Adventist students, coming from different parts of the country, have organized themselves into an association: Gulu University Seventh-day Adventist Community (GUSDAC), registered with the university authorities. The association's mission is to provide a faith shelter to the students and a witnessing avenue whereby Adventist young people can share their faith with other university students and the surrounding villages.

As part of that witnessing emphasis, GUSDAC student leaders, with the assistance of Israel Kafeero, the youth and chaplaincy director of the Uganda Union of Seventh-day Adventists,

and Hudson Kibuuka, the General Conference associate education director, conducted a revival/evangelistic series in Gulu from October 21 to November 3, 2012.

From the onset of the association, the Adventist students under the leadership of Kitembo Maliko, were active in sharing their faith in the community. Among those baptized as a result of their witness is Stella, a single mother of two. As soon as she was baptized, she found herself homeless: her grass-thatched house was burnt to ashes, as if Satan himself was in opposition to her decision to follow Christ. Students came to her rescue, rented a small house for her, and cared for the school fees of her older child. Stella says that "these students are kind and very loving, treating me as their sister," and testifies to everyone that God is in control in the midst of all the challenges she faces. Another one baptized was Michael, who was immediately disowned by his parents. The Adventist student association is taking care of the young man and paying his secondary-school expenses. Michael is hoping to become a physician and follow the ministry of the Great Physician.

When Kitembo Maliko left the university after completing his studies, the students elected Charles Mutazindwa as the new leader of GUSDAC. Immediately, he and his

associates planned for continued evangelistic and witnessing efforts in the community, which resulted in Drs. Kibuuka and Kafeero and two other assistants arriving in Gulu to conduct a revival and evangelistic campaign. Although the university was on strike when the evangelistic team arrived, the preaching, singing, sharing, and visiting activities went ahead as planned.

Under the general theme "Never the Same Again," the leaders presented messages of hope and concern. Both university students and community members attended the meetings, which were held in a tent, pitched opposite the main gate of the university campus. Students from nearby schools and colleges also surged in to hear the good news of hope. Dr. Kibuuka presented health and general topics, while Dr. Kafeero presented Adventist core messages. The lectures were focused on creating a deeper appreciation of the Bible and its central message of God's love and concern for all people. Jesus was made real to those who attended the meetings, and the in-depth study of the gospel led many to accept the good news of salvation.

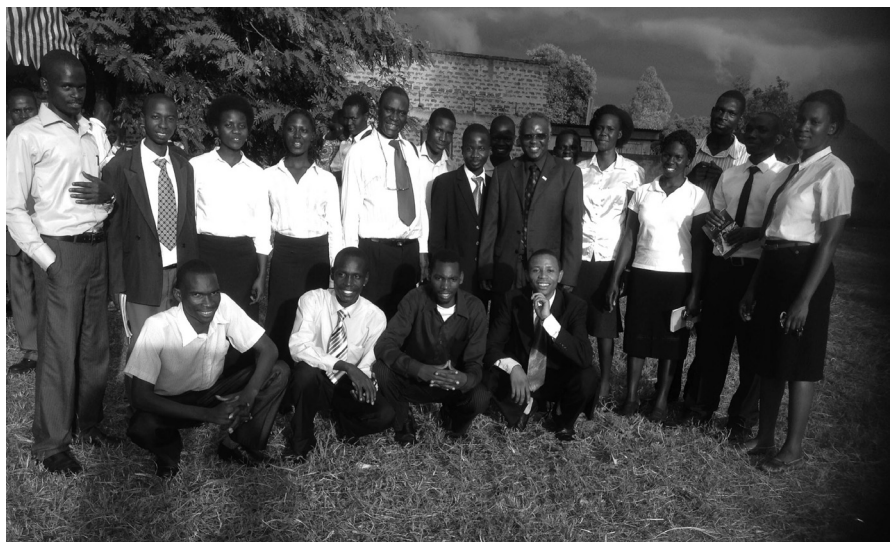
While the evening meetings were reserved for preaching the basic Adventist emphasis of the gospel, the visiting leaders and students took advantage of the afternoons to present

public lectures in surrounding colleges and high schools, on the theme “Fast-Paced Life in the 21st Century: How to Cope.” During the mornings, the group was also involved in community outreach programs, home visitation, and welfare activities. The day-long program became easier for the GUSDAC members because the strike had suspended all classes in the university.

When the meetings ended, 14 people decided to follow Jesus, and seven were baptized. Three of those baptized were students, two had completed their studies, and two were from the community. Among those baptized was Paul, who said he had been searching for a long time and was finally happy to have found a church that answered many of his questions. He said he continues to study his Bible for more answers, and they do come. Alice was another one who said she had been a lost sheep but was happy to join the fold with her brothers and sisters all over the world.

The group ran an austere campaign, and saved significant funds from the allotted budget. The savings helped them purchase a plot, with the hope of eventually building a church. Currently, the new believers, along with Adventist students, are using a university parking canopy for their Sabbath services. The facility is insufficient and not very comfortable, but worship as an act of faith goes on each Sabbath. Please pray for this budding church.

Charles Mutazindwa, a Gulu University student, is the current president of Gulu University Seventh-day Adventist Community.



Relationships: Cultural contours or biblical mandate?

by Carlos A. Chimpén

A positive, monogamous, and intimate relationship makes growth and the integration of identity throughout our lives easier. Here, culture cannot be our ultimate guide, but the biblical mandate of close and loving relationships can be.

Consider the following:

- Men are strong, tough, and never show signs of vulnerability; women tend to be passive and assume a less aggressive role.
- Men have more sexual needs than women.
- Men bring home the bacon; women cook it and serve it.
- Women go to work; men stay home and do the chores.
- Men and women are equal partners in life and all its responsibilities and privileges, although their roles may be different.
- Men do not break down and cry; women do.
- A monogamous relationship is not necessary for building a strong personal identity and lasting relationships.

Who is responsible for such attitudes? In one word: culture. Around the world, certain cultures accept that some of these statements as true, while others vehemently deny their truthfulness. It all depends on which part of

this vast world one is in. Culture often creates and insists on identities and constructs that differ from place to place.

Meanwhile, the Bible suggests a pattern focused on relationships and cooperation. Identity is formed in relation to other significant persons; thus, it is very important what others think of me, the messages they give me, and what I think other people think of me. Above all, the Bible commands that I live within the perspective of what God expects of me in my relationships with Him and with my fellow humans.

This relational living has shown that couples allow for individual identities to develop. If this is so, sexuality is also a creator of identity. This makes us wonder: How do sexual relations with different persons affect an individual's identity? Is it possible that one's identity may be affected negatively by non-monogamous relationships? With the help of the Bible, these questions are not difficult to answer, but is there any way of providing evidence on the basis of scientific stances?

A little theory

Humberto Maturana¹ is a Chilean biologist and neuro-philosopher who

propounded a general theory of cognition, whereby he suggested that the mind comes to be through human interaction and the use of language. His basic premise is that our minds are not in our brains; on the contrary, he says, our minds are the result of the linguistic interaction established by two human actors. From Maturana's ideas, we can isolate two very interesting deductions for the purpose of this paper, namely, that (1) conscience is social, not biochemical; and that (2) social relationships are creators of identity.

Michael White,² an Australian psychologist and founder of narrative therapy, states that people's lives are shaped by the significance they ascribe to their experiences, the place they have within social structures, and the cultural and linguistic practices from self and its relationships. Out of White's position, we may come to conclude that, (1) a church is a social structure that takes part in the creation of identity; and that (2) people with a definite set of religious beliefs assign different meanings to their life experiences than people who lack the same set of beliefs.

Thus, our identity is formed as a result of our interactive processes with other people, but at the same time,

every individual must learn how to build his or her own identity in the social group where he or she interacts.

Finally, another important theoretical principle to keep in mind is what is called the “attachment theory,” to which we now turn.

Love as creator of identity

Children need to be shown love. When children are not properly cared for, when they are not shown enough display of affection, their identity development is negatively affected, as has been widely shown by the attachment theory in all its forms: disorganized, ambivalent/resistant, avoidant, and secure. It is not the goal of this article to explain in detail each one of these attachment types. However, a definite kind of relationship is needed if we want to develop a secure attachment style, which is characterized by instilling a positive idea of self and others.³

It is important to note that attachment is not something that is only present during childhood, but it is a behavioral pattern that keeps active throughout life.⁴ One of the first manifestations of attachment is love, which apparently includes three elements in the process of identity development.⁵ They are: (1) two behavioral components to give and receive affection; (2) two cognitive components to see what is positive and good in the other and to forgive; and (3) an emotional component to ensure intimacy.

The human situation provides the primary place for upholding our identities through the interplay between what we say we are, what other people have told us we are, and what contexts confirm we are. In the case of two people, for example, this identity is upheld by two members through (a) the definition each one gives to himself/herself and the one assigned to the other member; (b) the definition each member has of the other; and (c) the definition each one gets from the other.

The relational construction as a couple is an ongoing interaction between its members, its members' expectations, original and present contexts, contradictions, confirmation and disproof — all of them being creators of identity.

The couples of postmodernity belong to a changing world where permanent values have faded away. Uncertainty is now the norm. There is less idealization, with more expiring dates and less permanence. Thus, when someone thinks of establishing a steady relationship, fears and doubt appear. People fear feeling tied and losing their identity or freedom. They fear distancing themselves from family, and they are afraid to grow and take on new obligations. All these fears become part of our identity. Who communicates those fears: the fear that a steady relationship is bad or negative; the fear that marriage will inevitably end too fast and too soon?

The answer to these questions is quite clear. Our own society and culture are the generator of these fears, which end up being internalized by people and reflected in behaviors which are contrary to the formation of a stable identity, or at least, to an identity free from fear.

A human couple is a creator of identity. The more stable a couple is, the more consolidated the identity of its members will be within a context of safety. In it, the members of the couple are able to express their vulnerabilities openly. Only in a stable relationship it is possible to develop an emotional link to channel our innate need for safety, protection, and human contact.

Sexuality as a creator of identity

From what has been discussed above, a logical conclusion can be drawn that sexuality is an essential part of the formation of identity. Sex is part of an intimacy that develops between two people. But what is intimacy, after all? And why might hav-

ing sex just “for fun” end up affecting our identity?

Díaz Morfa⁶ defines intimacy as the ability to put ourselves in another person's shoes in order to get in touch with his/her feelings. He points out that intimacy requires that the individual keeps his/her own individuality, and that only someone who trusts in his/her identity is able to get involved effectively in an all-encompassing relationship. According to Morfa, having sexual relations with another person not out of love but to satisfy a physical need is not an intimate act. In fact, he says, intimacy demands that I share myself and my feelings, so that through sex, true intimacy may be achieved.

In other words, having occasional intercourse, without any kind of commitment, or monogamous intercourse with a person without commitment (with the agreement that the relationship can be broken off at any time to start another) affects our identity, among other things, because of the conflict that arises within intimacy.

Once more, sexuality — understood as a safe context of identity creation where I can express myself such as I am, and where I am able to grow — is run over by internalized fears.

There are various fears that prevent intimacy from blossoming, and all of them are related to our own vulnerabilities, needs, and identity. Morfa⁷ identifies some of these factors as: (1) fear of revealing oneself; (2) fear of being abandoned; (3) fear of an aggressive attack; (4) fear of losing control; (5) fear of our own destructive impulses; (6) fear of losing our own individuality.

In contrast to these negative situations, the attachment theory defines love between adults as an emotional link that channels their inner need for safety, protection, and contact with other significant persons. As couples, we live to give and receive affection; thus, we look for a long-lasting intimate relationship. If I opt for multiple

partners, my safety and need for affection will definitely be affected.

Attachment forms a safe base for our identity, a source of protection and intimate contact that relieves tension and allows for positive adaptation and general welfare.⁸ That “safe base” is characterized by trust in the availability and response of the caregiver, and by the feeling that one is worthy of the care and love received. Is it possible to enjoy this “safe base” in a one-night stand? Don’t we lose that trust when we come to realize the relationship is just based on sex?

Conclusion

The development and keeping of one’s identity is closely related to the attachment process.⁹ Thus, a safe relationship is the natural arena where it is possible to re-integrate aspects of ourselves that have been neglected or rejected, or not even formulated. The basis of true intimacy is the possibility of sharing our emotional vulnerability.¹⁰ A positive, monogamous, and intimate relationship makes growth and the integration of identity throughout our lives easier. Here, culture cannot be our ultimate guide, but the biblical mandate of close and loving relationships can be.

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And Finally...

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ic assignment. Start by planning which treat you will indulge in. Choose something that you really want to do (listening to music, going for a walk, drinking lemonade). Set your alarm clock in order not to go beyond the 10 minutes (or the preset time) assigned. After verifying you have completed all your activities for the day, spend time enjoying something you really like. If you reach your weekly goals by the end of the week, give yourself a special reward (a new CD, a short walk, etc.).

Share your study goals for the week with your friends. Listening to your own voice when describing your plans will help you to be focused on your goals.

If possible, form a study group to make study time more lively and enjoyable. Besides setting a specific time, choose a specific topic, so everyone can be ready beforehand. The goal is not just to share various insights and study summaries, but to motivate each member of the group to be ready for the study exchange.

Be well rested and refreshed before undertaking difficult study sessions. A rested body and a serene mind help develop your study skills. Too much or too little sleep is detrimental, not only to your health but also to your study regimen.

Place inspiring quotations from the Bible or popular proverbs around you. These thoughts will provide you with positive strength and emotional support.

Trust God and allow Him to become your Teacher. Do not hesitate to ask Him to help you become more constant and patient in your studies, to teach you how to stay calm before an examination, to improve your ability to store information and reason out problems, to avoid distractions, and to enjoy greater clarity of mind. God enjoys being a witness to your growth and progress toward your goals.

Suelen Carvalho dos Reis wrote this article some years ago when she was a student of agriculture at Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). E-mail: ocadasu@gmail.com.

AND FINALLY...

Managing time while you are a student

by Suelen Carvalho dos Reis

Managing time is not easy, especially when you are in college. So many activities — academic, social, physical, devotional, and others — compete for the time that you have. Unlike in high school, a college or university student typically spends an additional two hours studying for each class period. This means that if you have 12 class hours a week, you need to devote 24 hours in academic preparation.

Following are some strategies in time management that will help you in managing your time as a college or university student.

Finding the time

1. During the first week of school, go through your assigned readings for the first two weeks. Thus, you will have a “spare week” that will help you to deal effectively with any unexpected situations.
2. Focus on your studies from Monday to Friday as if you had a full-time job. Make the best use of evenings, but try to study during the day. If you have to work, try to prepare a schedule so that you can reserve enough hours for studying.
3. Try using a personal planner. Place a semester calendar near your study desk where you can mark every deadline for exams, papers, and research projects. A weekly calendar will also prove

useful with different hour slots to fill in activities that need to be done. Some students would rather use post-it notes to be reminded of their duties. Finally, you should prepare a schedule for the following day. Thus, you will avoid spending time organizing your activities after you wake up the following morning.

4. If possible, try to study during the “best time” of the day; every person knows at what time — whether in the early hours in the morning, or in the evenings — he or she finds it easier to concentrate. Generally speaking, this period of time is so productive that for every hour you spend studying within that time frame, you would need at least one hour and a half at any other time of the day.
5. Try to finish your most difficult papers or research projects first.

Look for opportunities to study when engaged in other activities, such as when travelling by train or bus. You can also listen to a recording while driving. You should choose readings that do not demand a high level of concentration, but which may be useful for your study.

Try to memorize lists as you take care of everyday chores. For instance, while preparing food, you can memorize spe-

cific vocabulary, mathematical formulas, historical dates, or any other information that you can stick on a note by the place you are working.

Reducing distractions

Find a quiet place where you can study without being interrupted (a library, for instance). If this setting seems too peaceful for you, get used to it by trying to study there for relatively short periods of time, eventually adding more minutes little by little. Try to find other places where you may feel comfortable. Generally speaking, it is better not to study at home, where distractions are more frequent.

Do not allow for interferences or interruptions. Do not yield to any temptation along the way; do not switch on the TV before the end of your study time. Switch off your phone and place a sign on your door: “Student at study. Please do not disturb.”

As you study, keep a piece of paper close to you where you can write down key words that keep coming to your mind and that concern or distract you.

Increasing motivation

1. Give yourself a treat at the end of each assignment, day, and week. For instance, you could give yourself a 10-minute break after finishing a specif-

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C O L L E G E A N D U N I V E R S I T Y
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