

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

English • French • Portuguese • Spanish



**You, your neurons,
and free will**

**The Bible and the
church**

**History, philosophy,
and destiny**

From farm to fork



Volume 25

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CONTENTS

ESSAYS

5 You, your neurons, and free will: Concerns about reductionism and the popularization of cognitive science

Along with a longstanding Adventist commitment to the development of the whole person, as well as to the development of character through effortful practice, the Adventist position on human nature has much to offer cognitive science and the public at large, especially given the current state of popular cognitive science.

by *Karl G.D. Bailey*

9 The Bible and the church: Revisiting the obvious

As the written record of God's overarching plan to redeem the world from sin, the Bible provides His people with a worldview, a meta-narrative that spans from creation to the new creation.

by *Elias Brasil de Souza*

13 History, philosophy, and destiny: Insights from Daniel

Daniel's worldview and concept of the place of people and nations in God's plan to redeem the world has deep relevance for us today.

by *Warren A. Shipton*

18 Is Christian education really "ministry"?

Being a teacher in a Christian school doesn't automatically qualify one to be called a "teacher-minister." To be so described is, in verity, an honor. But it is also a responsibility borne by all those who believe they are called to serve in any of the ministries.

by *Don C. Roy*

23 From farm to fork: How should Adventists view the dark world of factory farms?

If our Creator views animal welfare as a societal issue of ethics, shouldn't humans, as His stewards, be exploring alternative industry standards that offer a better quality of life to farm animals?

by *Sandra Blackmer*

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL

3 Things that don't change
by *Lisa Beardsley-Hardy*

PROFILE

28 Humberto M. Rasi
Interview by *Sylvia Gregorutti*

LOGOS

31 Zipporah: The voice of silence
by *Mario Pereyra*

VIEWPOINT

33 Give them some truth
by *James Standish*

35 INTERCHANGE

EDITORIAL

Things that don't change

"How did they know I was here?" I wondered as I looked at the address label on the publication in my mailbox. I had just started a joint appointment at the University of Hawai'i as an assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Medicine.

Out of more than 18,000 students on campus, I had been the only Seventh-day Adventist in my doctoral program. The program had been involving enough, but social and ethical pressures were even more difficult to navigate. Besides me, I knew of four other Adventists elsewhere on campus: an undergraduate biology major, a comparative religion master's degree student, a young man doing doctoral research in plant pathology, and an older woman pursuing a doctorate in nursing.

On occasion, the five of us would meet under a spreading mimosa tree near the campus center to have lunch together — a tiny flock encircled by wolves of unbelief, secularism, and partying. During those years, I lost some cherished dreams and some close relationships. I learned a lot through the scholarly and cultural stimulation I encountered at the university, and this was good, but it also forced me to reevaluate my values and beliefs. This process of reevaluation, plus other personal strains and losses, was disorienting. Sometimes I felt completely alone. Nevertheless, I graduated on time and dove into the excitement of teaching and research at the university, glad to be earning a full paycheck and being called "Doctor."

Up until this time, I had not subscribed to or even heard of *Dialogue*. The inaugural issue just appeared unbidden in my department mailbox with my name on the address label. What a surprise it was to find in that first issue an essay by Michael Pearson, who had been my teacher at Newbold College some 13 years earlier. It was like having an unexpected heart-to-heart conversation with a trusted friend.

Dialogue filled a niche in my academic and religious experience. It made me feel connected to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a new way. The Sabbath School quarterly, other church publications, and even the friendly chats that I had with church members during potlucks all had their place. But here was a publication that understood what it meant for a person to be an Adventist academic and professional. I read all of volume 1, number 1, and have kept it these past 25 years. During this time, I never dreamed that I would one day serve as the journal's editor-in-chief, but that's my role now, and as such I have asked a few of those who wrote for the first issue to contribute to this year's Silver Jubilee.

A lot has changed since my time at the University of Hawai'i. The Internet was brand new and, as one of the first to use it, my university e-mail address at that time was simply lisa@hawaii.edu. By now, digitization has revolutionized the academic enterprise. Today, we take for granted such things as remote access to bibliographic databases, high-powered computing resources, social networking, international collaboration, and GPS-enabled geographical information systems for epidemiological research — in real time. Distractions and moral compromises, however, are with us still and can be indulged in as never before. Every new generation of Adventist students in higher education will have to find a way to relate their discipline to faith and live an example of commitment to God. In

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doing this, they will inevitably feel the pressure to conform to secular norms and values.

However, if there are challenges that don't change, there are also positive values that don't change, and during *Dialogue's* Silver Jubilee we want to celebrate some of these — like maintaining worthy goals and noble aspirations. Anyone in academia or the professional working world will have to be counter-cultural in order to maintain intellectual, ethical, and moral integrity. In that journey, *Dialogue* is still here to help. It endeavors now, as it did for me 25 years ago, to be a trustworthy friend to support you and build your confidence in

God. It's a forum where you can be as serious in your faith as you are in your profession.

Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy

— Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy,
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You, your neurons, and free will: Concerns about reductionism and the popularization of cognitive science

by Karl G.D. Bailey

Along with a longstanding Adventist commitment to the development of the whole person, as well as to the development of character through effortful practice, the Adventist position on human nature has much to offer cognitive science and the public at large, especially given the current state of popular cognitive science.

Imagine yourself lying on your back in a narrow tube. Your head is comfortably restrained, your ears plugged against the incessant banging of the machinery surrounding you. You are in a magnetic resonance imaging machine, and your brain is being scanned. Your task is to lie quietly and watch a stream of letters that, one after another, appear on a screen suspended before your eyes. Every half second, a new letter appears. You have been instructed that, at a time of your choosing, you should freely decide to press one of two buttons that lie beneath your left and right index fingers, and that you should then do so immediately. After about 20 seconds, if you are a typical research subject, you make that decision, and freely press a button.

As soon as you have pressed the button, the screen in front of you changes, and you see the last three letters that appeared before you pressed the button. This is no surprise — the

researchers told you that this would happen, and that you should indicate which of the letters was being displayed when you decided what button to press. Most of the time, you indicate that you decided what button to press about a second before you carried out your freely-chosen action. The task is simple; the choices are easy. The experimenters thank you at the end for your contribution of time to the study of free choice.

But all is not well, at least where your free choices are concerned. The researchers have been analyzing your data¹, and they have discovered that they are able to predict which button you will press by examining local changes in blood flow seven seconds *before* the button press. The researchers can also predict when you will press the button based on local increases in blood flow about five seconds before you press the button. And so, seconds before you reported your decision, there were signals in

your brain that indicated what and when you would make that decision. The implication: your brain decided what you would do long before any conscious urge.

This is not the only study to show this. An experiment conducted by Benjamin Libet and his colleagues in the 1980s² suggested that a brain wave thought to be a precursor of action (the readiness potential) preceded a hand movement by as much as a second, while estimates of the urge to act only preceded the hand movement by about half a second. In fact, over the last 30 years, the basic patterns of the Libet experiment have been replicated a number of times.³ And so it is that neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers are settling on the conclusion — even dogma⁴ — that free will and consciousness are illusions.

This conclusion flies in the face of what most people believe about themselves. An illusory free will calls

into question the intents of education, of democracy, of law, of religious belief, and of a Christ who began His ministry with a call to repent — to literally rethink your thinking. When presented with the arguments for the illusion of the will under laboratory conditions, moral decision-making suffers,⁵ raising the possibility that the perceived truth about the illusion of free will threatens society itself. And yet this view of conscious free will as an illusion is being popularized on bestseller lists,⁶ in national newspapers,⁷ and in highly-respected scientific journals.⁸ All is, indeed, not well.

The speed at which popular cognitive science⁹ has arrived at the conclusion that free will must be an illusion is troubling. While the problem of free choice has often been discussed with respect to determinism (the claim that all events have prior causes),¹⁰ I will be examining the relationship between the claims of popular cognitive science and reductionism.

Reducing the mind to nothing (but neurons)

Reductionism is the view that phenomena at a given level of analysis can be explained in their entirety by phenomena at an underlying level of analysis. In this case, mental experiences (psychological phenomena) are being reduced to the firing of neurons (biological phenomena). Despite — or perhaps because of — the simplicity of this idea, reductionism is part and parcel of the claim that free choice is an illusion. If choices can be reduced to nothing but neural activity in a particular environmental context, and the neural activity and environmental context can be measured, then all future decisions for a person can be known. Of course, this assumes a relatively simple view of reality, where all causation is from simpler to more complex events and phenomena, but the explanation, in its simplicity, is intuitive. Indeed, although there is little evidence that reductionism results

in the best explanations in science,¹¹ reductionist thinking is being increasingly applied to the question of what it means to be human. For example, men and women have been reduced to purported differences in brain structure¹² (the corpus callosum is often blamed), even after those differences have been shown to be an artifact of publication bias and misinterpretation of single studies by talk-show hosts.¹³ Love, in all its many splended forms, has been reduced to blood-level concentrations of neurotransmitters and hormones,¹⁴ glossing over other, more-troubling studies that implicate the same chemicals in envy, gloating, and in-group bias.¹⁵ Such reductionism should be of great concern to Seventh-day Adventist Christians, because one of our core beliefs about human nature is that human beings are an indivisible integration of mind, body, and spirit — without any one of these, the human self cannot exist¹⁶ (this is known as holism). Indeed, unlike the majority of Christians,¹⁷ Adventists are (or should be) materialists — we do not appeal to a dualism of body and soul in this life, after death, or in the life to come. In this, Adventists are consistent with modern cognitive science. But, unlike increasingly-common popularizations of cognitive science in the press, popular culture, and even scientists' public comments, Adventists cannot condone the reduction of the human person to “nothing but a pack of neurons.”¹⁸

These concerns are not new. In 1893, Ellen White preached a sermon¹⁹ on the dangers of popular phrenology — the belief that the mind could be reduced to the structure of the brain and thereby read from bumps on the head — in which she spoke forcefully against popularizations of the cognitive science and psychology of her time (to wit, popular phrenology). In her sermon, she told the story of a Brother Butler, who was convinced by a phrenologist that he lacked the brain area for faith and thus was a hope-

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less case. When Brother Butler began to preach the gospel at White's (and the Holy Spirit's) insistence, he found that the hollow in his head filled in. (It was likely never there — modern attempts to replicate phrenological readings have shown that the reading was a function of the phrenologist's intentions and expectations.²⁰) White concludes that phrenology offers no hope for change — but God does.

It is worth noting that the popular phrenology of Ellen White's day provided the language that everyone used to talk about the mind — we still talk about people needing to have their heads examined, or about having hollow heads, both echoes of our phrenological past — and the language of popular cognitive science plays a similar role today. Indeed, the current state of popular brain science in self-help and purported “brain-based” books is no better than the popular phrenology that Ellen White spoke against in the late 19th century. Scott Lilienfeld, a psychologist who has studied popular understandings of psychology and neuroscience, reports that only 5 percent of popularized works are based on any empirical study at all.²¹ Indeed, most “brain-based” learning strategies and products are based on what Sashank Varma, Bruce McCandliss, and Daniel Schwartz refer to bluntly as “neuromyth”²² in their comprehensive 2008 review of the relationship between cognitive neuroscience and “brain-based” education; these myths have become pervasive in the 21st century.²³

Neuromyths and well-lit brains

Neuromyths are created through what Eric Racine, Ofek Bar-Ilan, and Judy Illes refer to as neurorealism and neuroessentialism.²⁴ Neurorealism occurs when brain imaging is used in order to decide what is real — it reduces the mind (and spirit) onto the brain, describes people as nothing but their brain processes, and interprets correlations between brain activity

and certain tasks as evidence for normative human behaviors. An example of neurorealism would be a description of love as nothing but chemicals in the brain.²⁵ In neurorealism, any aspect of mental life that cannot be (or has not been) imaged does not exist. Neuroessentialism involves making the brain into the self; again, the self is reduced into the brain, this time in order to describe people as they supposedly really are. Because neuroscience involves trying to understand the dysfunction of the brain as well as the function of the brain, this often leads to describing normal brain function using the language of pathology and illness — as when love is described as nothing but an addiction. Neurorealism and neuroessentialism are especially incompatible with an Adventist approach to human nature. To begin with, holism and reductionism are incompatible; moreover, if we believe in restoring human beings to the image of God, we cannot describe normal brain functions primarily in terms of pathology (if God is love, can love be an addiction?). Neuromyths are also a problem, because they disrupt our interactions with individuals and communities. If the poor and prisoners can be reduced to dysfunctional “packs of neurons,” why clothe or visit them; if our sins were predetermined by our brains, why try to repent or forgive?

So what can we conclude from this? Should Adventists shun anything to do with the popularization of cognitive science? I would suggest that we take Ellen White's advice — given in 1884 — seriously: “Be guarded on every hand.”²⁶ Adventists must think critically about the modern science of the mind. This will not be an easy task. Separate studies by Deena Skolnick Weisberg and her colleagues,²⁷ and by David McCabe and Alan Castel²⁸ demonstrate that when unsupported claims about the mind are presented in the context of pictures or even mere mention of a “brain

lighting up,”²⁹ people, even those with some training in neuroscience, accept those claims uncritically — even if they would otherwise be very critical of the same statements without the brain-based content.

The only people to critique appropriately “brain-based” claims in the Weisberg study were professional neuroscientists with extensive experience in thinking critically about the design and interpretation of brain-imaging studies. It was not sufficient to have merely taken classes in neuroscience; an interest in and familiarity with neuroscience made readers more apt, if anything, to accept poor arguments in the face of the mention of the brain. While these studies have recently been challenged,³⁰ they are consistent with longstanding evidence that people tend to accept empty statements in place of explanations as long as they have the right form — that is, unless habits of mindful, critical thinking are present.³¹ Training such critical thinking skills requires time, practice, and effort;³² nevertheless, such training is at the core of what we desire when we talk about the integration of faith and learning.³³

Along with a longstanding Adventist commitment to the development of the whole person, as well as to the development of character through effortful practice, the Adventist position on human nature has much to offer cognitive science and the public at large, especially given the current state of popular cognitive science. As we integrate a position that finds balance between eliminating free will and over-committing to self-sufficiency, we can provide a model that makes sense of the wealth of data about human nature discovered in the last few decades. In so doing, we can promote a view of human persons that neither excessively excuses nor blames individuals through reductionism. Several lines of evidence pointing toward the role of effort in human development,³⁴ the efficacy of prayer

for changing religious experience,³⁵ the role of practicing self-control in preparation for future resilience,³⁶ and, in my lab, work showing the importance of internalization of Sabbath-keeping for human well-being all suggest that a wholistic, developmental approach to human nature — such as that held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church — holds more promise for the task of making humans whole than the illusion of reductionism.

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The Bible and the church: Revisiting the obvious

by Elias Brasil de Souza

As the written record of God's overarching plan to redeem the world from sin, the Bible provides His people with a worldview, a meta-narrative that spans from creation to the new creation.

Since its inception, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been committed to considering the Bible and the Bible only in establishing its system of beliefs and forming its mission. The Bible has also played a major role in Ellen White's prophetic ministry and in guiding the Adventist movement through some challenging times of theological turmoil. The current cultural, intellectual, and social circumstances indicate that as the church moves toward the future, its stance on biblical authority will face increasing challenges from every corner. Theological controversies, ethical dilemmas, and cultural demands will increasingly force the church — amidst turmoil of criticism, doubt, and social pressures — to take a clear stand on crucial issues. Given the realism of this scenario, one might ask: How can the church survive? How can the church preserve its identity through the changes and the challenges posed by the unstable moral foundation of contemporary society?

Sources of theological authority

In dealing with the challenges mentioned above, some people may appeal to tradition; others, to reason and experience. Well-intentioned believers may appeal to the community as the locus of ultimate authority. Unfortunately, all of these authorities, as helpful and convenient as they may be, are not solid enough to function as the bedrock foundation the

church needs to face the challenges that lie ahead. The Reformers examined tradition as the ultimate source of theological authority and found it wanting on the basis of biblical revelation. As good as it may be — and, of course, there is good tradition (see 1 Corinthians 11:2) — tradition in itself can never work as the ultimate foundation for the church's beliefs and procedures. By its very nature, tradition is ever changing and easily degenerates into traditionalism. As J. Pelikan says, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."¹ Although not wrong in itself, tradition is deficient as a superior source of judging its own authority or correcting its course. Scripture must ever retain that authority.

Reason might at first glance be a viable option, but that it is ultimately not reliable has been sufficiently demonstrated by the two world wars, which engulfed humanity in killing without precedent in our short human history and culminated in the Holocaust. Such atrocities, perpetrated by enlightened nations, reveal that the enlightened intellect does not stand the test of absolute reliability in matters related to the ultimate good. In regard to human values and the search for the supreme good, the Cartesian ideal — followed by the Enlightenment's obsession with making reason the ultimate locus of authority — has proved beyond any shadow of doubt to be a total failure.

Reason, as part and parcel of God's image in humanity, has an obvious and indispensable role in the apprehension of information and in the processing of knowledge. However, reason is deeply affected by sin and therefore needs a source of authority above itself to judge and correct its ways.

More recently, the community has been advanced as a viable option to hold the seat of ultimate authority. According to this view, the community of believers is to determine truth and decide what is right and wrong. However, the community is not reliable as a foundation for ultimate authority. Although the community lies at the core of what it means to be a church, and as much as one may value the authority of the community, it has also been affected by sin and as such is obviously not exempt from failure. Communities — religious and otherwise — have perpetrated horrible things against fellow human beings. In the late twentieth century, entire communities came close to the brink of being annihilated by other communities for religious, racial, or other reasons. So, as much as one may respect the authority of the community, it becomes evident that the community is not a reliable locus for ultimate authority. The community must be subordinated to a higher authority in order to decide what is wrong and what is right.

In the attempt to circumvent the problems attached to tradition, rea-

son, and community, one might point out that the Holy Spirit, by bringing enlightenment to the believers, stands as the supreme foundation of authority. Although such a suggestion appears to be absolutely right at first glance, it risks the danger that appeals to the Spirit often become a subtle way of legitimizing one's own subjective experience. Even in appealing to the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme seat of authority in theological matters, the believer risks arguing on the basis of a Jesus reconstructed according to his or her own personal or cultural preferences.

The power of the Spirit and the lordship of Jesus certainly play a foundational role in solving theological disagreements. Nevertheless, the question may be asked as to how one can be sure that a given course of action is being moved by the Spirit and, therefore, represents the lordship of Jesus. Again, in indiscriminate appeals to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus, the risk persists of replacing Jesus and/or the Spirit with reason/experience, tradition, or community, and therefore of identifying one's own desires and preferences with the will of Jesus and/or guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Among such important, though limited and restricted, sources of theological authority, the Bible emerges as the unique and absolute standard for judging all other authorities. Such a postulate emerges naturally from the example of Jesus and the self-authenticating claims of the Scriptures themselves.

It does not require too much effort to notice that according to the gospels, Jesus regarded the Scriptures as the ultimate court of appeal and repeatedly pointed to them to clarify an issue or settle a debate. In His appeal to a biblical passage, He asserted with absolute conviction: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:34, 35).²

The Scriptures claim over and over again that what is being said comes from God. Writing to Timothy, Paul

stated "that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17). This classical text affirms the divine origin of the Bible, with the consequent implications for its inspiration and authority. It evaluates the Scripture as being profitable and clarifies its purpose: "to make wise for salvation."

On the basis of the Scriptures' own claim in regard to their origin and purpose, we are justified in taking the Bible as the ultimate seat of authority. The epistle to the Hebrews declares: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2). This short passage illustrates and encapsulates the canon in its entirety. In the Old Testament, God speaks to us "in various ways through the prophets." In the New Testament, God speaks to us "through the Son."

Therefore, only the Scriptures are capable of leading us out of the maze of so many ethical options and theological points of view that are vying for acceptance in a culture of relativism and consumerism. Only by accepting the self-authenticating claims of the Bible and taking into consideration its absolute authority will the church be able to solve her theological and practical quandaries and still remain united under the lordship of Jesus Christ.³ In order to know what path we have to tread as a corporate church and as individual church members, there is no option but to turn to the Scriptures. After all, the Bible clearly voices its self-authen-

ticating claims of being the ultimate court of appeal in all matters of theology and practice for the church. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20; cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Relevance of the Scriptures

The revelation in the Scriptures is the most objective and foundational means God employs to communicate His will to the church. Although modern developments in the social sciences, semiotics, and linguistic theory have stressed the importance of various means and processes of communication — including nonverbal communication — the word remains the primary and foundational instrument for interpersonal interaction and relationships.⁴ Endowed with the image of God, humans received from the Creator the ability of objective and verbal communication like none of the other created beings that populate this planet. As if this were not enough, God revealed His will to human beings by means of words. And through the Bible He establishes relationships and gives guidance to His people. The effective power of God's Word in creation and regeneration, ubiquitous from Genesis to Revelation, is concisely expressed in Isaiah 40:8: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

The Word of God claims authority over all areas and dimensions of individual and church life. The seven points elaborated below exemplify some areas in need of attention if we want to be faithful to the comprehensive and gracious demands of the Scriptures.

1. Uplifting the Bible in the service of God

Theologians and Bible teachers have the solemn responsibility of putting scholarship into the service of God and His Word. More than 30 years ago, James D. Smart wrote *The Strange*

*Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics.*⁵ This work argues that although the Bible has been mass-produced and academic knowledge of it has increased, this knowledge has not reached the people. Hence, the crucial challenge that the church faces today is not ignorance of the Bible's message but the silencing of its authoritative voice. A perusal of some recent biblical and theological works produced by so-called conservative scholars seems to indicate the muting of some central claims of the Bible. To exemplify, one could mention the growing skepticism of some evangelical scholars about the literality and historicity of the Genesis creation account, coupled with an increasing disposition to accept evolution.⁶

This situation places a major responsibility on the shoulders of Adventist scholars. With a bewildering variety of theoretical frameworks and methodological options available in the academic community, Adventist scholars must use their skills critically to adopt right presuppositions and methods in the interpretation of the Bible. In addition, the combination of academic integrity with humility remains the standard for every Bible scholar and theologian. The authority of the biblical interpreter must be subordinated to that of the Bible, and particular opinions should be humbly submitted to the evaluation of peers and, ultimately, of the church at large. By integrating competent work with prayerful trust in the Spirit, theologians and Bible teachers will continue to be a blessing to the church, inasmuch as they help her to better understand and apply the Word of God. The words of Malachi, voiced to Israelite priests, fittingly apply to Adventist theologians and Bible teachers: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

2. The Bible and church leadership

Church leaders must allow the Bible to determine their leadership style. It has been acknowledged that the Bible is "the greatest collection of leadership case studies ever written, with tremendously useful insights for today's leaders and managers."⁷ But in matters of church leadership and administration, the Bible is essential not only because of its "case studies" but also because of the leadership principles contained therein. Business management techniques and marketing initiatives may have a place in the overall running of the church, but without the Bible these otherwise useful tools may become nothing more than secular models of efficiency and professionalism. Church leaders are called not only to promote the preaching of Jesus, but also to follow Jesus' style of leadership and administration. Church leaders are not called to act or behave like CEOs, but to be leaders like Jesus: "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

3. The Bible and prayer life

Prayer, an obvious spiritual discipline usually taken for granted, must have a biblical orientation. According to the Bible, prayer should be offered with recognition of God's holiness and human sinfulness. Biblical prayer does not function as a mantra to manipulate God, but as a means of communication and communion between penitent sinners and a merciful Creator and Redeemer. The following passage captures an important dimension of biblical prayer: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to

the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:6-8).

4. Bible-oriented evangelism

Evangelism must remain biblically oriented. Although there are many legitimate ways of motivating people to come to Jesus, the preaching of the Word must remain central in the missional undertakings of the church. Along and above the different methods employed to attract people to Jesus, strong efforts should be made to lead people to trust God's Word and follow the Jesus revealed therein. Thus evangelism in its manifold expressions should not only proclaim the person of Jesus, but should also invite people to obey Jesus and be faithful to His message as revealed in the Scriptures. True evangelism honors the Scriptures. When summoned before King Agrippa, Paul clarified that his preaching intended to say "no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come" (Acts 26:22). And, in continuation, the apostle asked the monarch the decisive question: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?" (Acts 26:27).

5. The Bible's role in Christian education

Christian education must also be conditioned by the Scriptural revelation of God. That education in its ultimate sense must take into consideration the word of God is clearly expressed by the admonitions of God's wisdom in the many biblical passages that emphasize the instructions/law/testimonies of the Lord as the source of wisdom. The larg-

est chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119, is entirely devoted to extolling the benefits of the Torah — the revelation of God — for the spiritual and intellectual growth of God’s children. Each verse of that great psalm has a clarion call to the supremacy of God’s law in human life. In the same vein, other literature of the Hebrew Bible does not spare words to advise and admonish those in search of wisdom to cherish God’s word. With a keen perception of what the Bible means by education, Martin Luther penned this much-quoted statement: “I am much afraid that schools will prove to be the great gates of Hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.”⁸ Hence the relevance of God’s appeal to His children: “Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth” (Proverbs 4:5).

6. The Bible and music

The ministry of music is an important area of church life that needs to be founded on the Bible. Music may excel in many communication forms as a means of conveying the truth. There may be many Christians who do not know the Bible well, but there is hardly a person who does not know several hymns or gospel songs. Conflicts involving music styles and music instruments have engulfed some congregations, but as important as music style and music instruments may be in conveying the right atmosphere for adoration, one should not be oblivious to the importance of song and hymn lyrics. The messages in hymns and songs should be in harmony with the teaching of Scripture. Church composers and musicians have a sacred duty to make and perform church music in such a way as to communicate a message consistent

with God’s character revealed in the Scriptures: “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding” (Psalm 47:6-7).

7. The Bible and church worship

Church worship must give an important place to the reading and preaching of the Scriptures. The worship service should not become a venue for so many announcements and advertisements of church activities and programs that hardly any time is left for the exposition of God’s Word. When God’s people gather together to worship, they need to receive the Word of God to help them face the trials, discouragements, and challenges of daily living. Nothing should impair or replace the proclamation of the Word. Preachers who use the pulpit to tell personal stories without responsible biblical exposition or who use the pulpit for the mere entertainment of their audiences are betraying their calling and profaning the pulpit. What Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2 should become the orientation point of every preacher: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

Our preaching and exposition must be informed by appropriate study and investigation of the Scriptures. The Bible does not function merely as a recipe book or a reference book. The Bible does not always yield easy and ready answers for some of life’s challenging circumstances. One may not find a specific passage or verse for each spiritual malady or personal problem.⁹ But the Bible, if rightly interpreted, certainly provides the ultimate answers for life’s most crucial questions — and even for matters related to church procedures — because the relevance of the Bible transcends the sum of its individual parts.

As the written record of the overarching plan of God to redeem the world from sin, the Bible provides

God’s people with a worldview, a meta-narrative that spans from creation to the new creation. Although individual passages and texts may bring comfort in situations of sorrow and suffering, and even provide guidance for specific circumstances, one should never lose sight of the organic interconnections among the various passages and themes of the Bible in the grand panorama of the plan of salvation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every preacher to make the unity, truth, and authority of the Bible clear and accessible to the audience. Preachers should pay attention to Paul’s advice to Timothy: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Conclusion

As argued above, the Bible stands as the absolute foundation upon which the church should base her theology and practices. As Paul emphasized in Ephesians 5:25-27: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”. Therefore, in order to remain faithful to the Lord, the church must continue to uphold the Word of God as the supreme authority to prescribe her beliefs and adjudicate her experience and practice.

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Continued on page 17

History, philosophy, and destiny: Insights from Daniel

by Warren A. Shipton

Daniel's worldview and concept of the place of people and nations in God's plan to redeem the world has deep relevance for us today.

When we open the book of Daniel, the author tells us that he was a recent captive taken to Babylon. There he experienced remarkable personal challenges and unusual and sometimes unsettling visions. If we consider these at the general level, we are introduced to a level of information different from that usually taken from his prophecies and accounts. These understandings are remarkably applicable to us today, irrespective of location.

The noted historian Professor Collingwood perceptively stated that "the ultimate aim of history is not to know the past but to understand the present."¹ And we might add that the aim of religious history is to understand the present and provide guidance and hope for the future (cf. 2 Peter 1:19).

With this in mind, we will briefly consider some of the more evident principles in the book of Daniel.

The past informs the present

The book of Daniel opens by informing us that no person is an island. Our actions impact others. Daniel and his companions were captured and placed in unfavorable circumstances on account of the actions of the nation's leaders, not their own. The kingdom of Judah had not learnt the lessons given to Israel some hundred years previously (Jeremiah 18:6-12; 26:2-8). They too participated in ungodly practices and unethical behavior. Consequently, in 605 BC

they lost their independence when Babylon forced Judah to pay tribute. This humbling act was meant to function as a wake-up call.² However, the nation could not be reached and continued to its untimely end, accompanied with the record of amoral acts (2 Kings 23:26; 24:1-2).

The kingdom of Judah ceased because it failed to internalize the robust worldview held by Daniel and his companions. These young men represented part of the remnant group, prepared to stand courageously for their faith. They understood early on that each individual and nation has its God-given role, and that failing to act honorably and according to the principles revealed by God has disastrous consequences. This was emphasized as they saw Nebuchadnezzar, under God's direction, successively punish the Amorites, Moabites, Philistines, Egyptians, and citizens of Tyre for their malicious and boastful behavior (Ezekiel 25:5-17; 26:3-7; 29:3-9, 17-19).

Unified worldview gives purpose and hope

Daniel functioned at a pivotal point in history. The national representatives of God's kingdom on earth had failed to be His ambassadors and went into captivity. At about the time of Daniel's activities, new philosophies were arising that would seduce the world, such as Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Buddha, Pythagoras, and Zoroaster

(Mithraism came from his teachings). Each of these philosophies had its own attractive elements, which tracked the truth, but also emphasized beguiling perversions. Ancient Babylon itself acted as the "fountainhead" from which all other false religions gained inspiration. These ties are particularly evident in Hinduism, for example.³ The neo-Babylonian empire, in which Daniel found himself, was particularly noted for its contributions to astronomy, with a well-developed system of astrology attached for telling the future.⁴

The genuine worldview that underpins the biblical account was firmly held by Daniel and his companions, as is evident from their words and deeds or from the account of those sympathetic to and influenced by them. The elements are as follows:

1. The universe is ruled by a personal, creator God. The miraculous delivery of the worthies from the fiery furnace and Daniel from the lion's den gives abundant evidence that God has a personal interest in people (Daniel 3:24-25, 28; 6:22).

2. God is living and infinite. These thoughts were expressed by King Nebuchadnezzar during his conversion experience (Daniel 4:34-35; 6:26), a thought impressed upon him by the Holy Spirit.

3. God's kingdom is based on the principle of love (Deuteronomy 10:15-19; cf. Matthew 22:36-40; 1 John 4:7-8). In spite of their rebellion, He

promised to be their Savior and to justify repentant sinners (Isaiah 45:22-25). The relationship that Daniel had with God (Daniel 9:23; 10:11; 12:13) indicates that he understood this foundational principle. He took the instruction in Deuteronomy 10:12, seriously: "... what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (NIV).

4. God's kingdom is based on unchangeable moral principles. He is righteous, merciful, and forgiving; His behavior is understood by His law, which reflects His character (Daniel 9:7-11; cf. Psalm 89:14).

5. God's kingdom is opposed by dynamic antagonistic forces (Daniel 10:13, 20-21). The information revealed in Chapter 8 (11-14) informs us that the focus of one prominent, anti-God power will involve questions about the adequacy of God's mercy and its compatibility with His code of justice. Interestingly, Daniel's contemporary Ezekiel identifies such thoughts as being inspired by Satan (Ezekiel 28:12-19; cf. Revelation 12:3-5, 12-17).

6. Evil will ultimately be destroyed (Daniel 2:44; 7:26-27). The apostle Paul says: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20, NLT), which echoes the thought of Genesis 3:15.

7. Immortality belongs to God and is His gift to the overcomer (Daniel 12:13; cf. 1 Timothy 6:16).

These principles are at the heart of the great controversy worldview held by Seventh-day Adventists, which is similar to that held by remnant groups throughout history. This alone should give us confidence in God's leading.

History is a subtext to the Creator's activities

The apostle John indicates that history is a subtext to the Creator's activities in two of his books (John 1:1-4, 14;

Revelation 1:5-7). History also is a revelation of God's ways; indeed, of Christ the Creator's ways. Given these thoughts, some difficult questions can be resolved by considering the record of God's creative activities. This is a familiar position taken by Seventh-day Adventists — for example, the seventh-day Sabbath and care of the body. Now, we should not be at all surprised that Daniel and his friends understood that Bible history is an account of God's relationship to the whole of His creation.

Daniel and his companions showed their high regard for the order specified at creation with regard to their food and drink (and no doubt other areas too). In so doing, they showed respect for their bodies, spiritual development, and care of creation. In fact, in some ways they were in advance of our thinking. Daniel 2 paints a picture of God smashing the empires of this world with a rock ("cut out without hands" — Daniel 2:34). The focus of these nations was (and is in those operating today) on acquiring material wealth and finding methods of advancement (metals of utility in the images conveys this idea) — consumerism and self-aggrandizement were alive and well in neo-Babylon. God used the basic building material of the earth (rocks) to deprive the nations of their continuing cycle of prideful activities. Here we have a powerful reminder that the nations, the descendants of Adam, are derived from the soil (*adamah*) and are dependent on the creator-God for life. All who fail to understand the character and ways of the personal creator — God will be deprived of their power.

The practical consequence of such an understanding is that if the Bible account outlines a consistent pattern of thought/behavior at creation and in the new creation (new earth state), then it is a given that God wishes His followers to organize their lives consistent with this information following their conversion (re-creation). For

instance, the seventh-day Sabbath was kept in Eden, was kept by Christ, and will be kept in the new earth (Genesis 2:2; Luke 4:16; Isaiah 66:23). Hence, the seventh-day Sabbath is to be kept as a sacred portion of time. Again, at Eden God designated the food for the human race as plant-based (Genesis 1:29) and in the new earth no bloodshed will occur, meaning that this state will be re-established (Isaiah 65:25; Revelation 21:4; cf. Romans 8:22). It follows that a vegetarian lifestyle is God's ideal today (1 Corinthians 10:31; cf. Revelation 14:7) and will prove beneficial to both physical and spiritual health.

Nations have distinct roles in fulfilling God's purpose

God has worked (and continues to do so) with different cultures in order to accomplish His grand plan for their salvation. Babylon and Medo-Persia (Eastern powers) and Greece and Rome (Western powers) were involved in setting the stage for Christ's appearance and ministry in the centuries after Daniel. These nations interacted with other groups to the north and south. In this manner, the universal importance of the prophecies relating to the birth and ministry of Christ were emphasized.

When Christ was born, the dominant Roman Empire was in power. It facilitated trade with many countries, and news of events in the Empire travelled across vast areas. For example, the Chinese were aware that a great event had occurred in the West relating to the coming of a Messiah (Maitreya). An expedition was sent (AD 64) along the Silk Road in response to a dream seen by the emperor Ming-Ti. Unfortunately, the expeditioners returned with Buddhist Mahayana scriptures.⁵ Interestingly, however, the only surviving astronomical record of the star accompanying Christ's birth comes from China.⁶ This event was associated with the visit of wise men from the East

(Matthew 2:1, 7-10), which illustrates the wide interest ancient peoples had in astronomy (and astrology) and the thirst they possessed for acquiring new knowledge. It is regrettable that the knowledge of God's condescension and mercy was not accepted more widely in its pure form.

The movement of ideas across cultures flowed along the trade routes. This led to penetration by the Church of the East to the far reaches of Asia.⁷ It also led, for example, to the absorption of Jewish ideas about the coming Messiah into Buddhism (Mahayana), and these in turn influenced aspects of Chinese religious practices.⁸ Unfortunately, pagan ideas seeped into the Christian church, particularly in the time of Constantine the Great. These movements were foreshadowed by Daniel, and he mourned the difficulties to which the community of faith would be subjected (Daniel 7:28; 8:27).

Truth does not change

We are confronted in Daniel 1 by the courageous decision made by four young people to uphold the principles outlined in Scripture, which they had learnt at home. In contrast, under peer and supervisor pressure, a majority of their companions decided that truth could take a back seat.

While the majority of the bright captives repudiated significant cultural and religious practices and principles under pressure, Daniel continued unmoved. This was graphically demonstrated when his work colleagues, envious of his principled behavior and consequent favor, set about to trap him. The plot involved Daniel's prayer life (Daniel 6:6-9). The co-conspirators in this plot banked on Daniel not compromising his relationship with God or altering his public witness. They were not disappointed.

Throughout his lifetime of service in Babylon, Daniel refused to accept perversions of the great plan of salvation outlined in Genesis 3:15. The

soothsayers and magicians (Daniel 4:7) made the dead to appear, and the violent death of Nimrod (the founder of Babel — Genesis 10:8-10) was remembered, as represented by the weeping for Tammuz (Jeremiah 44:15-18 — Tammuz represented reincarnated Nimrod). The death of Nimrod was presented as being voluntary, and was ostensibly for the benefit of humanity and connected with the removal of sin and suffering (i.e., worship representing an alternative version of the crushing of the serpent's head found in the Genesis account).⁹ In contrast, Daniel gladly accepted that the prophecy recorded in Genesis as pointing to Christ's birth, ministry, and suffering was assurance that he would receive eternal life (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; Daniel 9:24-27; 12:13).

The attempts to pervert truth that began post-Flood in ancient Babylon continue to this day. Daniel was not silent about this trend, as indicated by his account of the activities of the little horn power (Daniel 8:9-12). One of Satan's favored methods of working is to combine elements of unsanctified beliefs with genuine ones. The dominant church functioning after the death of the apostles successfully accomplished a synthesis of pagan doctrines and Christian beliefs, and continues to do so. In so doing, they pretended to sanctify pagan practices.¹⁰

Cross-cultural communication and sensitivity is promoted in God's Word, but syncretism is not (Matthew 7:5-9; 15:2-3). Daniel's life is a testimony to this principle. He warned of the coming of a religious power that would interfere remarkably with the concepts of both God's mercy and justice (Daniel 7:25; 8:9-12; cf. Psalm 89:14). In doing this, he has given us a warning about any philosophy or doctrine that does not hold these two great pillars of God's kingdom in balance. Careful analysis of all the great philosophical systems in the world, outside of authentic Christianity, indicates a failure to pass the test. There is

an ever-present danger that in sharing the gospel across cultures a similar synthesis will occur. Daniel warns us to be careful.

Principles underpinning stable government

Many rulers have arisen with the goal of achieving notable status and even regional and world dominance. A number have attained remarkable success. However, history is littered with examples of strong leaders being succeeded by weak ones, and there are numerous instances of empires and people groups disappearing.

How these events might be explained is a challenging exercise. Certainly, charisma and strong personal characteristics are required in a leader, and vision and encouragement for the citizenry to think creatively and to work cooperatively are good starting points. A country also needs a robust economic base. The Bible, however, emphasizes qualities based on the principle of love (*agape* type). This principle shows outward expressions in such things as the pursuit of righteousness, mercy, meekness, purity, peace, moral practices, and advancing knowledge of the creator-God (Matthew 5:3-20, 38-48). The consistent application of these principles on a national level will contribute to success; their rejection will ensure the edifice will falter and eventually fall. The response of the masses to these principles is also pivotal to national prominence and continuance (2 Chronicles 33:1-9; Hosea 4:1-3; 6:6; 7:14-16). The same principle holds true for the smooth running of society and its basal unit, the family.

Going back to the time of Daniel, we can observe what attitudes and practices helped nations to fill their cup of iniquity, leading to their failure. Of Israel it was said: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you ..." (Hosea 4:6, RSV), and other nations were spoken about

similarly (Jonah 3:4-10; Romans 2:11-16). This was because they rejected the idea that moral precepts originated with God and ultimate judicial authority rested there too. Clearly, the neo-Babylonian empire came to an end on account of pride, wanton rebellion against the knowledge of God, glorying in the power of pagan gods, and living to satisfy the senses (Daniel 5:2-4, 18-28).

Pride, departing from the moral virtues found in all cultures,¹¹ rejecting the calls of conscience, and ignoring the lessons coming from the book of nature (Romans 1:20-23; 2:14-16) all contribute to national decline and disgrace. The worldview adopted and the attitude and commitment of the citizenry to the pursuit of righteousness are factors of vital significance in explaining the events of history.¹² When the cup of iniquity of the nations is full, the end will come.¹³

Chosen instruments

We now turn our attention briefly to consider the individual responsibilities highlighted by Daniel.

Daniel and his friends were able to influence the affairs of the neo-Babylonian nation. They rose to positions of trust and honor (Daniel 2:46-48). Remarkably, when the Medo-Persian forces invaded Babylon, Daniel's administrative skills were still recognized (Daniel 5:30; 6:1-3). He adapted to the new culture, with its underlying religious philosophy, without compromise. He also had learnt the art of sharing elements of the plan of salvation beyond familiar borders and became an effective missionary (Daniel 2:28, 44-45; 4:19-27; 6:22-27; cf. 12:3). This is God's plan for us too. The indispensable instruction given by Christ to all His followers is to share knowledge of the hope they possess (Matthew 28:19-20).

God also showed through the experiences of Daniel that He has unusual allies and that the most unlikely individuals may respond to the prompt-

ings of His Spirit. Would you have chosen King Nebuchadnezzar as being potentially interested in knowing God's plans? Daniel saw the opportunity and used it, and I have no doubt that he tried to find a way to tell Cyrus about Isaiah's prophecy concerning him (Isaiah 45:1-5; cf. Daniel 12:3). Daniel was fearless in living his beliefs in a positive manner and speaking in favor of God as opportunity presented. He possessed not only skill and learning but also had cross-cultural sensitivity.

Just as surely as Daniel and his companions were instruments in God's hands, we too have been singled out by God for the purpose of bringing the knowledge of God to others.¹⁴ We are to tell others that there is a creator-God who cares for all.

Life is held in God's hands

The naked truth about life came home to Belshazzar with stunning force the night a mysterious hand wrote on his palace wall; he was proclaimed wanting in moral principles and perished at the hands of Darius the Mede's soldiers (Daniel 5:5-6, 25-28, 30). Daniel and the three worthies were very familiar with God's protective care. They understood that their lives were in God's hands and that He would protect them and deliver them from death, if His name would be honored (Daniel 3:16-18; 6:21-22; cf. Hebrews 11:31-40). They did not fear death or God's judgment, for they were at peace with him daily. Daniel was assured that God's saints will inherit the "sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven," and furthermore, that God's kingdom will not end, and the saved will worship Him throughout eternity (Daniel 7:27, NIV). In these words, we are assured that immortality is God's gift to all who follow Him in sincerity.

Coincident with the idea that our lives are in God's hands is the instruction that in this life we must make

our decision for God. No additional opportunities will come our way. Belshazzar learnt this when Daniel announced that God had weighed him and found Him wanting (Daniel 5:27). This information was repeated in a separate vision recorded in Daniel Chapter 7, where God is pictured in all His magnificent grandeur presiding over the record of people's lives (Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). This scene causes us to consider our actions seriously, and is meant to generate awe and commitment and a sense of calm confidence and joy (Daniel 7:27).

All this was in sharp contrast to the doctrine emanating from ancient Babylon that held the great Nimrod as being the emancipator of men and women from fear in the judgment. He was featured as being translated to heaven, giving rise to the idea that one's soul could migrate to heaven unconnected with God.¹⁵ Belshazzar followed this path of belief, and God answered his brazen defiance conclusively. Today, this transmits a clear message to all who are tempted to choose a similar pathway of self-indulgence and self-salvation.

Live to glorify God

Daniel accepted and taught a worldview consistent with the original given by the Creator. He was a participant in the new covenant relationship highlighted by his contemporary Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-33). He lived a consistent and faith-dominated life (e.g., Daniel 2:17-19; 6:10-11, 21-22). What we look back to in an historical sense, Daniel looked forward to by faith (Daniel 9:24-27).¹⁶

The community of faith commenced in Eden, not in AD 31 at Christ's resurrection. The woman of Samaria understood this truth along with others (John 4:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Hebrews 4:1-5), yet many still proclaim with relish that the teaching of the Messiah (in today's terms, Christ) commenced only after Christ's

resurrection, and that many of His teachings were borrowed from others. Daniel's worldview and his faith in the creator-God reflected the views of his predecessors going back to Adam, which means that his beliefs trace their origin to a point in history that has priority over all others. It has been well noted that any similarity found in other philosophies is by alteration or derivation from the original.¹⁷ Christ was the agent chosen by God to communicate with mankind from the beginning (John 1:1-4, 14). Small wonder, then, that the teachings of the New Testament can be found in the Old, and that Christ advised us to give attention to the writings of Daniel (Matthew 24:15).

Daniel understood the great principle that character development determines destiny. This has been stated nicely by one author: "God has only one intended destiny for mankind — holiness. His only goal is to produce saints. ... Never tolerate, because of sympathy for yourself or for others, any practice that is not in keeping with a holy God. ... Holiness is not simply what God gives me, but what God has given me that is being exhibited in my life."¹⁸ Daniel rejoiced in the prospect of the resurrection of the just (Daniel 12:13), for he followed after holiness. You can too!

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The Bible...

Continued from page 12

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Is Christian education really “ministry”?

by Don C. Roy

Being a teacher in a Christian school doesn't automatically qualify one to be called a “teacher-minister.” To be so described is, in verity, an honor. But it is also a responsibility borne by all those who believe they are called to serve in any of the ministries.

Christian educators use various terms and expressions to describe the enterprise they are engaged in: “Christ-centered education,” “teaching from a Christian perspective,” “Bible-based curriculum,” “redemptive discipline,” “servant ministry,” and so on. Such phrases seem reasonable and proper to describe the enterprise in which Christian teachers are engaged. While each term has a particular connotation, the ideas they represent cluster around the notion of what constitutes “ministry.” It is not uncommon to hear Christian education referred to as “the ministry of teaching.” But is it just a fanciful jargon and cliché? Or is Christian education really ministry?

This question prompts many others. What do we mean by ministry? How many ministries are there? Are all ministries the same or share anything in common? Are they of equal status? This article attempts to identify and explain the essence of ministry, whether the concept of ministry applies to Christian education, and how that concept affects the practice and administration of education. In addition, the article explores the crucial issue: how well does current practice in Christian schools measure up to this ideal?

Primary considerations

Fundamental to our discussion is that we pursue it with a biblically-informed consciousness, or what Harry Blamires and others call “a Christian mind.”¹ This is more than a casual label. It is undeniable that in the West, we live in a secular age and are impacted by its profound effect. The impact is greater than we realize, and we need to be ever vigilant to secularism's subtle inroads and consciously resist blindly following practices that conflict with biblical principles and values.² To think with a Christian mind challenges one of our greatest weaknesses: our tendency to live compartmentalized lives, in which we separate the sacred from the secular.³ At its worst, spiritual sensitivity is diminished as secular modernity prevails. Despite the fact that Christian educators frequently speak of “a balance between the spiritual, mental, physical, social,” the reality is that it is often fragmented and piecemeal. For example, the spiritual activities of a Christian school frequently stand distinct from the formal curriculum in which subjects are taught to criteria dictated by external public authorities.

Can genuine Christian education rightly be described as ministry? The

Bible provides us with an orientation and frame of reference to discover answers to this question, and also to all of the big questions relating to what is real, how we know, and what is good and of value. The answers to all of these questions stem from the historical flow of Scripture. Together, they form a powerful metanarrative, described variously such as the “cosmic conflict,” or the “creation-fall-redemption-consummation” theme. In the face of postmodernity's disparaging attitude toward core metanarratives, Christians assert that this metanarrative is the basis of a distinctive, normative worldview that is the center of their personal faith. The heart of that faith embraces and responds to an understanding of who God is, what He has done, the origin of humanity, humanity's dilemma, God's response to that problem, and humanity's ultimate destiny.

Appreciating what it means to be human. Fundamental to our discussion is a clear understanding of what it means to be truly human. Unlike widely-held assumptions of humans evolving from some primeval state, this discussion endorses the biblical account of humans being uniquely created by God Himself (see Genesis

1, 2; Psalm 8). As creatures, humans are seen as primarily dependent on Him as the source of life, meaning, understanding, and purpose in their capacity to display intelligence, decision-making, creativity, emotion, physicality, individuality, sociality, and spirituality. In so doing, they are intended to be image bearers, designed to reflect, in some small measure, aspects of what God is like. But personality is more than merely the sum of those parts. These qualities comprise an interrelated whole, the human soul, which “lives, and moves and has its being” in the Creator (see Acts 17:28).

Recognizing humanity’s predicament. A fundamental problem confronts every member of the human race. Christians believe that a rebellious choice by humanity’s primal parents severed the open relationship they had previously enjoyed with the Creator. As a consequence they — with the world — were plunged into a conflict of cosmic proportions, with the capacity of those who would follow to reflect the image of God well-nigh destroyed. Despite this predicament, human nature in its very essence craves and actively seeks to be reconnected with the Creator. Thus Augustine reflected, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”⁴

The context and essence of ministry

The Good News proclaimed in the Bible essentially makes people aware of the way God has provided hope and meaning for human existence in the face of the dislocation and brokenness caused by the Fall. Contrary to the popular accusation that God is harsh and vengeful, His compassionate, redemptive nature is highlighted in a theme beginning in Genesis 3 and traced throughout all Scripture.

The oft-quoted declaration of the Gospel in John 3:16 is followed by another of profound significance:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17 NKJV).

Many Christians tend to be preoccupied with the forensic side of salvation and miss recognizing that the word “save” or *sozo* (Greek) also has connotations of healing, not only of physical ailments, but also of comprehensive healing — body, soul and spirit. In His miraculous acts of healing, Jesus bore testimony to this. Physical healing was accompanied by emotional and spiritual healing. Broken relationships were restored and exclusions were dissolved, resulting in social acceptance, reconciliation, and peace. Salvation is restoration in the most comprehensive sense. Restoration is wholistic; that is, it is more than the sum of the parts. It focuses on the development of the whole person — spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. The term “whole person” carries with it important implications. Although aspects of personhood can be identified as distinct elements, the notion of wholistic development assumes the effective integration or interweaving of each element with the others. To the western mind, this poses a conceptual challenge that must be overcome.

The concept of ministry comes to prominence in the writings of Paul addressing the *ekklesia* or “the church” of the New Testament. Due to its function, it was referred to as the *koinonia*, that is, “the fellowship” or “community of faith,” and “the body of Christ.” The goal was always building up, restoration, and reconciliation. Paul’s words are noteworthy and illuminating: “It was [Christ] who gave some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors, some to be teachers, to *prepare* God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining

to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ... . From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The word translated as “prepare” has significant connotations. The verb *katartismos* implies healing. To the Greek mind, it was akin to the setting of a broken limb or restoring a dislocated joint. It also has significance in the political sense of bringing together alienated parties to enable harmonious governance to continue.⁵ In essence, this process represents a reversal of the alienation resulting from the sin of our first parents. This ministry is focused on Christ. As Paul states so eloquently: “He was supreme in the beginning and — leading the resurrection parade — he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe — people and things, animals and atoms — get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross” (Colossians 1:18-20, *The Message*).

It must be stressed that this ministry of reconciliation happens in community. But what we are considering is more than just a community as a sociological phenomenon. William Andersen argues that the New Testament church, *ekklesia*, fits the community profile, but takes the argument a step further. He argues that the Christian school should be recognized as a ministry of the church at large, reflecting the same elements of community, and sharing the same ultimate goal: restoration of wholeness, or, as often stated, “the restoration of the image of God in man.”⁶

Implications of ministry

Clearly, while there are different ministries that are called to serve in specific contexts — church, health, education, welfare, counseling, etc. — it is argued that their goal is the same: restoration. Thus, these ministries are complementary. They are not discrete and independent. Rather, they are interdependent. From time to time, assumptions of superior status produce attitudes that reflect a sense of superiority and assumed authority that are obstructive and disruptive. The validity of such assumptions bears questioning. The evangelical church often asserts its roots in the Reformation but forgets the views of Luther and Calvin on the ministerial status of “theologians, gardeners, janitors and tradespeople.”⁷ Christian schools adopting such a vision and mission truly emulate the redemptive, restorative ministry of Jesus Himself. That ministry of restoration has salvific implications. Salvation is reconciliation in the most comprehensive sense. As Westly explains:

Salvation in the biblical sense cannot be understood in one-dimensionally, narrow, reductionist, parochial ways. The salvation the Scriptures speak of offers a comprehensive wholeness in this fragmented and alienated life. Salvation in the biblical sense is a newness of life, the unfolding of true humanity in the fullness of God (Colossians 2:9), it is salvation of the soul and the body, of the individual and society, of humankind and the whole of creation (Romans 8:19).⁸

Such a view represents a significant challenge to the false dichotomy commonly posed between the sacred and the secular. As Harry Blamires argues, the Christian mind is able to see the most secular aspects of life from a Christian perspective because of the individual’s orientation to biblical presuppositions and values — that is, their worldview.⁹ George Knight argues that Christian education is true ministry and each teacher is an

“agent of salvation.”¹⁰ It is also religion in essence (Latin *religere* = “to bind together again”).

The ultimate goal of Christian education

Christian education can be regarded as one of the complementary ministries envisaged by Paul (Ephesians 4:11-14). The process that underpins Christian education in all phases and aspects is formation. The ultimate goal of that process is sometimes expressed as the restoration of the image of God in humans through the harmonious development of the mental, social, physical, and spiritual faculties.

This goal envisages a process that in all phases and aspects represents wholistic renewal. In recent years, the term “spiritual formation” has gained wide usage and describes such renewal. But in our adoption of the term, we are not talking about a nebulous spirituality that is commonly encountered in postmodern thinking. We are speaking of dynamic, formative, biblically-grounded development empowered by the Holy Spirit as part of the shared work of the Triune God. It assumes a disposition that accepts as a given that “in [God] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:25). Dallas Willard reminds us that the term can be rightly regarded as “spiritual re-formation” in recognition of our origin, our fall, and our new potential.¹¹ Spiritual formation, in other words, is re-creation in response to our predicament and God’s answer through the work of Christ and the conviction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As such, it is the work and prerogative of the Holy Spirit. Such formation aligns with the redemption phase of the creation-fall-redemption-consummation motif. It constitutes a lifelong response to personal acceptance of God’s act of grace in Christ at Calvary. It is an essential part of God’s plan of restoration, transformation, and renewal, seeking to heal human

disconnectedness resulting from the Fall, and part of the ministry of the Gospel as commissioned by Jesus in the New Testament. It leads to the reflection of God-likeness, personal integrity, and unselfish service, rather than the elevation of human greatness, material gain, and status. This development is viewed as progressing through stages of maturity and character development relative to age.

Understandably, teachers of mathematics, science, technology, commerce, and the like will query the fit of their subject specializations in the overall scheme of things. The contribution of Christian teachers in a pastoral role alongside their teaching specializations is accepted by most. But that role tends to be seen more as a complementary role than an integrated, wholistic one: value-added benefit of the Christian school. But there is a fundamental problem with such a dualistic view. A preoccupation with the here and now and preparation for a working career tends to eclipse other perceived roles. But this paper argues that this-world needs should not be ignored, but are part of the whole. It advocates a macro view that provides a context in which these specific elements — the subjects of the formal curriculum — are integrated and extend into eternity. Over recent decades, debate has ebbed and flowed around the term “integration of faith and learning.” By this we are not advocating a contrived cobbling of spiritual allusions, object lessons, and the like into every lesson — in other words, *pseudointegration*¹² — unless those linkages are natural.

What is the relationship of the apparently-secular subjects of the curriculum to spiritual formation? The short answer is; “Everything!” Otherwise, we are upholding dualism that is inconsistent with Paul’s assertion that “in God we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:29). A notable example of a disposition that does not separate the sacred from the

secular is that of Brother Lawrence, the Carmelite monk, who “practiced the presence of God through the washing of pots and pans and serving his brothers.” It does not apply just to religious life. In this regard, Pettit argues rightly when he asserts:

This process should not be divided into the spiritual and physical, private and public, or secular and sacred. It involves the integrated, whole person — one’s manner of thinking, habits and behaviors, and the manner of relating with God and others — and it should result in a life of loving God and loving others well.¹³

Pettit further explains that by using the term “spiritual,” we are referring to the dynamic, wholistic, maturing relationship between the individual believer and God, and between the individual believer and others (both believers and unbelievers). Thus, two principles emerge to prominence. First, formation is personal, where a particular individual is being changed (formed) at the core of his or her being (spirit). This lifelong transformation is set into motion when one places his or her faith in Jesus Christ and seeks to follow Him. Secondly, the change or transformation that occurs in the believer’s life happens best in the context of authentic, Christian community and is oriented as service toward God and others. Thus, the whole of life is not lived in monastic seclusion. As responsible image bearers, our worship, study, work, recreation, community service, cultural pursuit and expression, and social interaction are harmoniously integrated — in all things, “whether eating or drinking or whatever is done, it is done to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). As such, it encompasses all facets of personhood, and bears testimony to the quality of comprehensive formation.

The implications for teaching as ministry

The formal curriculum. A biblical view of knowledge recognizes both

a supernatural and a natural order, where God is acknowledged as the ultimate, essential source of all wisdom and virtue. Thus, true knowledge is more than a body of factual information and marketable skills to be transmitted, learned, reproduced, and applied. True knowledge encompasses cognitive, experiential, emotional, relational, intuitive, and spiritual elements functioning as an interrelated whole. Christian education seeks to restore to factual information its true meaning as a way of knowing God and His creation, and acting responsibly as disciples, servants, and stewards to one another and the created environment. The commonly-viewed distinction between the sacred and the secular is artificial and false. All truth is part of God’s order, and His presence can be recognized and practiced in even the apparently-secular and mundane aspects of life. Acquisition of true knowledge leads to understanding that is manifested in wisdom, integrity, appropriate action, and worship. True knowledge is active by nature — knowing is doing, and knowing comes through doing.

Christian schools respect the place of the traditional disciplines or learning areas in representing particular realms of meaning that are typical of the respective subjects. These are seen as part of the human quest to explore, discover, understand, test, and communicate those understandings. Ronald Nelson argues, “each [discipline] develops its own heuristic, that is, its own principles and methods of discovery. Each devises and revises its own special categories, its own conceptual system. Each claims the prerogative of formulating its own criteria for judging the validity of what is put forward by scholars in the field. Each has its own sense, diffuse and debated though it might be, of what the integrity of the discipline requires.”¹⁴

Thus, the disciplines may be regarded either as windows through which to see, or windows of opportunity by

which to act. As windows, they provide an opportunity to see or perceive and understand something of God and His activity. These are reflected through the created world, the Bible, and the cosmic conflict and promote appreciation of Christian heritage. As windows of opportunity, they motivate response, application, expression, and practice that are conducive to community building, citizenship, social justice, and stewardship of the environment and resources in ways that are consistent with biblical values. These values are sometimes described as kingdom values because of their foundation in the New Testament account of Jesus’ life and teachings. Therefore, in planning the formal curriculum, a balance is sought between spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, and emotional understanding. While some learning areas fit closely in one category, they often have relevance in other categories or “realms of meaning.”¹⁵ They are not discrete one from the other. Because they all find their shared origin in God-centered reality, cross-disciplinary linkages are recognized and engaged, particularly in the primary and middle years of study. This can be seen as providing opportunity for integration around relevant themes of study.

The formal curriculum serves as a venue for true learning: opportunities to make connections, see patterns and wholeness, form a big picture, and in doing so, portray meaning.¹⁶ Such learning reflects a move from surface knowledge to deeper meaning. In a similar vein, research on the function of the brain in learning accounts for ideas and experiences being built into neural nets or maps of meaning that go together to make up a big picture (or gestalt). Such conceptualizations of learning help us to understand what faith is and how it grows. These ideas are not new in essence. Fowler, for instance, speaks of the development of personal master stories as part of one’s faith.¹⁷ These master stories are

at the heart of what Stephen Covey¹⁸ describes as paradigms that inform and drive the development of personal integrity of character, meaning, and effectiveness.

The Christian teacher's role. As a minister-teacher, the Christian teacher's role is of central importance. As well as being experts in their teaching fields, with the ability to promote and support learning in those areas, the teacher's role in Christian schools is more extensive and wholistic. Such teaching is a sharing of realities or weaving connections between their subjects, themselves, and the world until students make it their own. So as professional educators, they are expected to be competent in their respective fields of teaching, motivating and maintaining high levels of engagement in learning in a fair, just, non-discriminatory, and emotionally supportive manner. They will be sensitive to the spiritual implications and connections inherent in their learning area. They will reflect a disposition that is open to new perspectives, collegial, reflective, and self-critical in their quest for excellence to the glory of the Creator. Christian teachers will also be people of faith and integrity who share the vision of the school and its goals and will actively model the culture, ethos, and lifestyle of the school system within and beyond their own classrooms. While specialists may take a designated pastoral role, individual teachers will actively nurture and support children in pastoral ministry. They will be continually conscious of the impact they have upon the unplanned learning of their students.

The learning environment. Christian schools seek to provide an enriched, meaningful, spiritually- and culturally-sensitive learning environment. There is effort to make connections between the student and the subject matter, between the head and the heart, and develop maps of meaning in the minds of their students. Thus, there is sensitivity to the culture,

typical methodology, and skills of the different learning areas and where they fit within the larger scheme of learning. Teaching approaches will acknowledge and affirm the diversity of intellects and gifts shared between the learners, and promote excellence in all facets of development. Teachers will generally function with students as facilitators and mentors in an interactive, emotionally-supportive manner, and students will often work in collaborative, cooperative learning and peer-sharing settings in a wide range of activities, both within and beyond the school. Teachers will recognize and follow opportunities to explore new spiritual insights and understanding, both planned and incidental, and encourage personal decisions and commitment in students.

The Christian school: a community of faith. Learning, as we have reflected, is obviously not limited to the classroom. As a community of faith, the Christian school provides a cultural setting or context that enhances the quality of learning, and conversely, the community's ethos is enhanced by the quality of that learning. Just like the New Testament *koinonia*, personal identity and physical, spiritual, and psycho-social well-being are nurtured and maintained. Dwayne Huebner¹⁹ describes this dynamic graphically. He adopts the metaphor of weaving to describe how individuals create a "fabric of life," comprising an interweaving of ideas, abstractions, memories, biblical metaphors, and cultural mores derived from the faith community and the relationships within it. He argues that life in the intimacy and context of those relationships affirms a personal and a collective past that, in turn, acknowledges, practices, and celebrates the presence of God. And it is dynamic, nourishing, and renewing. Such ideas are consistent with the kind of individuals God created in His image, with the capacity to think and act.

Conclusion

Just calling a school Christian doesn't make it so. Being a teacher in a Christian school doesn't automatically qualify one to be called a teacher-minister. To be so described is, in verity, an honor. But it is also a responsibility borne by all those who believe they are called to serve in any of the ministries. If we are honest with ourselves, we need to acknowledge disparities and flaws in what we presently observe in Christian education. Some are just relatively more up-market, selective, academically-competitive clones of the public school down the road, but with a veneer of spirituality thrown in. The challenge will always be there to resist the secular tide, the subversive threats, and the influence of those who would compromise the potential of authentic Christian schools. It will only be in this context that such vocation and service can truly be called "ministry."

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Continued on page 30

From farm to fork: How should Adventists view the dark world of factory farms?

by Sandra Blackmer

If our Creator views animal welfare as a societal issue of ethics, shouldn't humans, as His stewards, be exploring alternative industry standards that offer a better quality of life to farm animals?

Lentil roasts, mushroom patties, and scrambled tofu have long been dietary staples for Seventh-day Adventists — decades before vegetarianism and “going green” became accepted trends. Together with the mission to share the gospel, the Adventist health message has played a prominent role in the church's belief system. But does healthful living demand more of us than a focus on our own personal health? Do Adventists have a responsibility to consider the impact of our food choices on the health of our communities, the health of our planet, and the treatment of the animals that are used for food production? In order to address these matters, we must first consider the journey our food takes from farm to fork.

No “Old McDonald's Farm”

For those of us who have rarely, if ever, stepped foot on an animal farm, we likely envision cows grazing on rolling hills, chickens scratching in the grass, and pigs wallowing in the mud. In the current world of agribusiness, however, the reality contrasts starkly.

The vast majority of animal products — including meat, dairy, and eggs — are produced on factory farms, or CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). The nearly 10 billion animals caught up

annually in the U.S. food production system¹ typically live in crowded conditions, with no access to the outdoors — eating foods that are unnatural to their species, and enduring a variety of mutilations without the benefits of anesthesia.

Chickens are debeaked, for example, so they won't peck at and injure one another as they live crammed together in small wire enclosures called battery cages, with no room to move about or stretch their wings. CAFO dairy cows are confined in pens or crowded feedlots and are regularly impregnated in order to continuously produce milk. Genetic manipulation, a diet unnatural to bovines, and growth-hormone injections significantly increase yields. In a natural environment, a cow can live 16 years or longer. Under intense factory-farming conditions, however, they quickly become so exhausted and ill that by age 4 they are called “spent” cows and sent to slaughter. Pregnant sows are kept in metal enclosures called gestation crates that are only a little larger than the pig itself. They are unable to walk or turn around. Although even meat-eating Adventists don't consume pork, this animal's plight is still worthy of our consideration.

Farm animals also are subjected to cruel treatment in the process of trans-

port to slaughterhouses. Pigs, cattle, and sheep can legally be confined for up to 28 hours during transport without being provided food and water, even in extreme hot or cold temperatures.² Severe injury and even death are not uncommon, and are viewed by most companies as simply a cost of doing business.

Slaughterhouse abuses are also well documented.^{3,4} The USDA Humane Methods of Slaughter Act requires that farm animals be insensible to pain before they are shackled and killed, but this law is regularly flouted, as many undercover investigations have exposed. Studies indicate that penalties for not following USDA humane-slaughtering regulations for cows, pigs, and sheep are frequently not imposed.⁵ There are no federal regulations that cover chickens, turkeys, and other animals such as rabbits at any stage of their lives.⁶

Evolving industry standards

Factory farming originated in the U.S. following World War II. At that time, corn production exploded, and the price crashed. With access to so much cheap corn, the meat industry discovered it could feed corn to cattle more cheaply than grass, and the profits outweighed the fact that corn is not their natural or more health-

ful diet. The discovery of vitamin supplements for animals also played a large role, enabling farmers to raise animals totally indoors. Antibiotics and vaccines then allowed animals to be raised together in confinement in large numbers, by preventing diseases that would normally occur in such intensive-farming conditions. A lack of government regulations for the treatment of farm animals permitted the industry freedom to treat the animals this way and eventually became the industry standard.

Chickens were the first animals to be raised in factory-farm environments. This was followed in the 1960s by the first factory-farmed cows and pigs. The United States began shifting from small, diverse, independent farms to agribusiness and corporate factories. The family farmers were unable to compete with the low production costs, and the vast majority were forced to sell their farms.^{7,8}

The practice of factory farming soon spread from the U.S. to Canada and Western Europe. Countries in Latin America, the Caribbean,⁹ India,¹⁰ and China¹¹ are also beginning to emulate the systems of the industrialized nations. By 2020, those living in developing countries are predicted to consume more than 86 pounds of meat per person per year — twice as much as they did in the 1980s. People in industrial countries, however, are still expected to consume the most meat — 220 pounds a year by 2020.¹²

Shifting attitudes

Animal advocacy groups, news media, and advancing scientific research on animal intelligence and emotions are raising awareness of factory-farm conditions, and attitudes are slowly beginning to change. As recently as 2001, not a single state in the U.S. had banned any factory-farming practice that is standard within the industry, such as battery cages or veal and gestation crates. A decade later, nine states had legislated phase-outs

on gestation crates, six states on veal crates, and two states on conventional battery cages. In 2012, numerous fast-food and supermarket chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Harris Teeter, Safeway, Costco, and Sysco, committed to requiring their suppliers to eliminate gestation crates and battery cages at an agreed-upon future date. Food companies such as Kraft and Campbell Soup are following suit.¹³

Scientists are adding their voices to the issue with an increasing number of published studies confirming the existence of animal intelligence and emotions, asserting that animals are able to perceive pain as humans do because their brains are not that different from ours.¹⁴ Temple Grandin, a noted professor of animal science at Colorado State University, says science has shown that animals such as mammals and birds feel pain in a manner similar to humans, and that animals with complex brains also have greater social and environmental needs.¹⁵ Cognitive ethology, once dismissed as unscientific, is now a reputable and growing discipline, to the extent that in July 2012 an international group of scientists signed The Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness, supporting the notion that animals and humans are comparably conscious.¹⁶

U.S. institutions of higher education, such as Washington State University and the University of California-Davis, are incorporating new types of agricultural curricula to meet these altering food-production perspectives.¹⁷ Consumers are playing a central role in fueling these changes, as a growing number are demanding food they see as healthier and produced on sustainable farms that are environmentally friendly and treat workers and animals responsibly.

Rising global awareness

North Americans are relative late-comers to the move toward more responsible and sustainable farming.

Although awareness of the issues is growing in the U.S. and Canada, countries outside North America are effecting change more quickly. Switzerland, for example, banned battery cages for chickens in 1992 — the first country in the world to do so.¹⁸ As of January 2012, the entire European Union has enacted a similar ban.¹⁹ Some 485 professors of various scientific fields in Europe have banded together as an environment and nature conservation group espousing the phasing out of factory farms.²⁰ Some are advocating smaller, organic farms as a sustainable solution.²¹ Claus Leitzmann, director of the academic advisory council of the Urban Growth Boundary (GB) Forum of Germany, says current “husbandry conditions contradict our ethical values of a respectful handling of living creatures. [These practices] are embarrassing for a civilized society.”²²

Human and environmental health

In addition to ameliorating the cruel treatment of factory-farmed animals, other reasons exist to consider limiting animal-product consumption. The personal health benefits of a vegetarian diet, for example, are well known to Adventists. The Loma Linda University Health Studies, conducted throughout the last 40 years, have provided evidence-based research and raised scientific awareness of the close relationship between diet and health. The Adventist Mortality Study (1960-1965) indicates that both Adventist men and women live longer (6.2 years and 3.7 years, respectively) than their non-Adventist counterparts, and have less risk of cancer, less hypertension, and lower measured blood pressures. Study results indicate that Adventists experience better health, in part, because of their vegetarian lifestyles.²³ Numerous studies by other scientific and nutritional research groups also have confirmed the health advantage granted by a vegetarian diet.

Antibiotic resistance is another issue. Health officials are sounding the alarm on the emerging ineffectiveness of antibiotics in curing illness in people, and the blame for this appears to rest largely on factory farms. About 70 percent of all antibiotics produced in the United States are fed to farm animals to stimulate faster growth and to keep them alive in overcrowded conditions.²⁴ The antibiotics then pass to humans through the consumption of animal products and other forms of human-animal contact, thus contributing to an increasing resistance to antibiotics used to treat various diseases. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Medical Association, and the American Public Health Association have issued warnings against this practice.

Environmental issues, such as global warming, are also growing concerns, particularly in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, which devastated portions of the Caribbean and the northeastern shores of the United States in late October 2012. A United Nations report released by its Food and Agriculture Organization in November 2006 describes the livestock sector as a top contributor to the most serious environmental problems — land degradation, climate change, air pollution, water shortage, water pollution, and loss of biodiversity — on both local and global levels,²⁵ largely as a result of animal waste, and that “urgent action is required to remedy the situation.”²⁶ In 2009, the Worldwatch Institute credited livestock and their byproducts with producing a staggering 51 percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions.²⁷

More than a billion tons of animal waste are produced each year in the U.S. alone.²⁸ These huge quantities are dumped into open manure lagoons because they cannot safely be recycled back into the earth. Leakage often occurs, resulting in contaminated land, waterways, and air.

U.S. attorney and environmental

specialist Robert Kennedy Jr. describes good environmental policy as identical to good economic policy. “We can generate instantaneous cash flow and the illusion of a prosperous economy,” he says, “but our children will pay for our joyride, and they’re going to pay for it with polluted landscapes, poor health, and huge cleanup costs that will amplify over time. We’ll be left with a nation that’s something we won’t be proud of.”²⁹

CAFO workers

The health risk for CAFO workers is significant. The approximately 700,000 full-time and part-time factory-farm workers in the U.S. are continually exposed to harmful gases (ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and methane, resulting from microbial degradation of urine and feces) and particulate matter (fecal matter, feed materials, skin cells, and products of microbial degradation of feces and urine).³⁰ This results in respiratory disorders, cardiovascular complications, chronic aches and pains, repetitive stress injuries, and premature death.³¹

Emotional dangers also exist. Routine exposure to animal suffering and death can desensitize workers, who naturally must limit their concerns about the pain they inflict. Studies indicate links between the methodical slaughterhouse killing of animals to thoughts of violence and violent actions, and “can be compared to the mental and physical manifestation of war crime atrocities.”³² Links between animal abuse and domestic abuse also have been documented.³³ More than a century ago, Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White addressed this matter. She implored believers to consider the effect that meat-industry cruelty has on those who inflict pain on animals, saying “it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God.”³⁴

Is anyone doing it right?

A rising number of farmers are examining today’s industry standards as they apply to animal welfare and human and environmental health and are choosing a more ethical position. Will Harris, a multigenerational family farmer and owner of a large organic cattle, sheep, and chicken ranch in Georgia, believes that because humans take dominion over these animals (see Genesis 1:25, 26), we must take on responsible stewardship.³⁵ Harris’s cattle and sheep are not raised in confinement but graze freely on pastures. They are solely grass fed. No pesticides or chemical fertilizers are used on the land, nor are the animals given any artificial hormone implants or sub-therapeutic antibiotics. Sixty separate enclosures house his chickens, kept in relatively small flocks of 500 each. (Factory farms typically keep 10,000 birds that are being raised for meat permanently confined in a single shed.) Once the chicks reach three weeks of age, they are free to come and go inside and outside the enclosures. No debeaking is done.

Harris ran his farm by CAFO standards for a number of years, but found that the production model had unintended adverse consequences for the land and the animals.

“We used copious quantities of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. It really boosted the production in the short run, but it caused an addiction to those pesticides and chemical fertilizers,” he said.

Harris returned to his family’s previously-employed organic and humane farming methods in 2003, focusing again on the health and overall welfare of his animals and the land.

Why should Adventists care?

To Seventh-day Adventists, the Bible is the foundation of the understanding of right and wrong. If we carefully examine Scripture, God’s care and compassion for His nonhuman creatures is evident in numerous

instances throughout both the Old and New Testaments, including the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary professor Denis Fortin says that God, in His directive to rest and keep holy the Sabbath day, remembers the animals and the environment:

“His original plan included a symbiotic relationship between animals and humans; that there was to be harmonious support and care between all parts of His creation. Adam and Eve were given the stewardship of the earth, to care for the earth, not to destroy it. In the Sabbath commandment God enshrined a clause for the protection of animals. Adventists recognize that it was never part of God’s plan that animals should suffer at the hands of humankind, or to be eaten. This commandment reminds us that we are still stewards of all the earth, and we are responsible for protecting it.”³⁶

God’s compassion for animals and His expectation that the Israelites were to care for them responsibly is evident in biblical societies: one must help a donkey when it has fallen under a heavy load, even if the animal belongs to an enemy (Exodus 23:4, 5; Deuteronomy 22:1-4); large work animals were not to be muzzled while working, so that they could eat while doing heavy agricultural work (Deuteronomy 25:4). In the New Testament, Jesus declared that even the most common of creatures is loved (Luke 12:6). If our Creator views animal welfare as a societal issue of ethics, shouldn’t humans, as His stewards, be exploring alternative industry standards that offer a better quality of life to farm animals?

Ellen White expressed sensitivity to the issue of animal cruelty. She wrote that animals love and fear and suffer, show sympathy and feel tenderness toward their fellow animal companions in suffering, and often exhibit affection for people that is superior to that shown by some of the human race.³⁷

Andrew Linzey, director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics and a member of the University of Oxford theology faculty, asserts that God expects humans to care for creation because “the divine image only warrants a more careful, diffident, and conscientious stewardship of creation, and animals in particular” — a concept, he noted, that is gaining increasing acceptance among theological scholars and religious organizations today.³⁸ In June 2011, for example, the General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations passed a statement of conscience titled “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.” It reads, in part: “We acknowledge that eating ethically requires us to be mindful of the miracle of life we share with all beings. With gratitude for the food we have received, we strive to choose foods that minimize harm and are protective of the environment, consumers, farmers, and all those involved in food production and distribution.”³⁹

Worldwide hunger and malnutrition add another weighty moral component to our dietary choices. Approximately 2,500 gallons of water⁴⁰ and 10 to 16 pounds of grain⁴¹ are required to produce one pound of beef. These statistics indicate that the more meat people consume, the less total food and pure water are available to feed others.

Pursuing a better way

Practicing appropriate farming methods and feeding a growing world population are obviously complex challenges without easy solutions. The high costs to human health, the environment, and animal welfare resulting from today’s CAFO industry standards, however, compel us to pursue a better way.

Unfortunately, many people appear to be disinterested in the animals’ journey from farm to fork, rarely thinking past the grocery store.

Perhaps this is because the process is often invisible to consumers, making it harder to understand the realities of the animals’ plight. Others don’t grasp the bigger picture of whole earth care, which affects environmental and human health.

We humans, however — particularly Christians — have a biblical and ethical mandate to care for all God’s creatures and the environment in which we live. The original diet of Eden will be restored in the earth made new (Isaiah 11:9), but even now we can care responsibly for the world that we share with the rest of God’s creation.

Ways to effect change

1. Consider reducing or eliminating meat from your diet, and possibly your consumption of dairy products and eggs.

2. Be a conscientious shopper and purchase animal products from companies that utilize the most humane farming practices and are earth-care conscious (e.g., read product labels, contact vendors, do research on the Internet). Buy locally-raised animal products from small family farms that embrace more humane standards. Become familiar with humane-standards certification programs, including Certified Humane, Animal Welfare Approved, and the Whole Foods Market program.

3. Raise awareness. Share with others what you learn about the origins of food through research and conversations with experts in the field, and suggest better options that you personally have discovered in your community. Talk to your local grocery store manager about the possibility of carrying humanely-raised animal products.

4. Contact your political leaders to encourage their support for laws that help improve the treatment of farm animals and care for the environment.

Sandra A. Blackmer is features editor for *Adventist Review* and assistant editor for *Adventist World* magazines. She has received awards and recognition by the Associated Church Press, and was nominated for a Genesis Award in the Outstanding Written Word, William Wilberforce Award category for her interview with Loma Linda University's Sigve K. Tonstad in "What Are We Really Doing to God's Creatures?" (*Adventist Review*, Mar. 18, 2010). This award recognizes journalistic excellence on animal protection issues in faith-based publications. E-mail: blackmers@gc.adventist.org.

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PROFILE

Humberto M. Rasi

Dialogue with the founder of this journal

Interview by Sylvia Gregorutti

Humberto M. Rasi has had a long and fruitful career as a teacher, editor, educational administrator, and author. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the home of an Adventist minister, he completed his secondary studies and a one-year pre-university program at River Plate Adventist College. While finishing an advanced degree in Spanish language and literature instruction, he began his teaching career at Instituto Adventista Florida in Buenos Aires.

He and his wife, Julieta, moved to the United States in 1962, where his first job was as a translator and editor at Pacific Press Publishing Association. A master's degree at San Jose State University was followed by a Ph.D. from Stanford University in Hispanic literature, with a secondary emphasis on Latin American history.

Between 1969 and 1978 Rasi served successively as a teacher, department chair, and dean of graduate studies at Andrews University, with a break for a postdoctoral year at Johns Hopkins University — thanks to a scholarship from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Returning to Pacific Press as chief editor for international publications (1978-1986), he supervised the production of books and journals in several languages, including the seven-volume Spanish edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

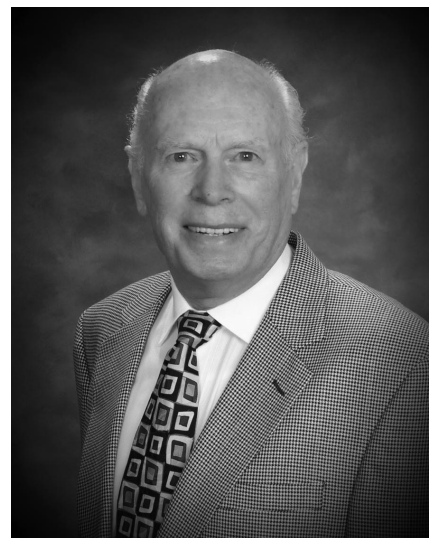
In 1987, Rasi joined the General Conference world staff as asso-

ciate director of the Education Department. In 1990, the world church elected him as the director of the church's global education system, a post he held with distinction until he retired in 2002. During his leadership, the church's global education ministry had more than 1.5 million students in 145 countries around the world. Among his initiatives were an increased focus on and development of the integration of faith and learning from elementary to university level, and the establishment of *Dialogue*, an international journal addressing the intellectual, spiritual, and social needs of Adventist students attending public and private tertiary institutions around the world.

Rasi's scholarly activities include authoring numerous publications in English and Spanish on religion, literary areas, and education. In recognition of his professional achievements, three universities granted him honorary doctorates. In 2002, the General Conference recognized his contribution to Adventist education by bestowing on him its highest award: the Medallion of Distinction.

Currently among the ranks of the "retired," Rasi continues to lecture, publish, and direct special projects in the field of Christian higher education and apologetics.

■ *Most of your professional life has been focused on education and publications. What attracted you to these areas?*



Jesus chose to come to this world as a teacher. He is my model. To be an agent in the development of young men and women in the context of Christian education has been a great privilege. I was blessed with several outstanding teachers who taught me to think both critically and creatively, and I've attempted to pass that on to my students over the years.

Our mind expands as we feed it true, life-transforming ideas. For centuries, those ideas have been communicated mainly through books and other publications. Think of the positive impact that printed copies of the Bible have had on the lives of millions around the world. For these reasons, I've enjoyed research and writing as well as helping others share their ideas with a wider public through the printed page. My two grandfathers were involved in publications, so I feel that some printer's ink runs through my veins.

In recent years, electronic media have become another important source of information. However, it's vital to use discernment as we negotiate the flood of information it brings. Our goal as Christians should be wisdom — the ability to choose the best way to achieve the highest goals in life.

■ *Which aspects of your work in education have brought you the greatest satisfaction?*

After I left the classroom for administration, I focused on strengthening the identity and mission of Adventist schools and universities, and to use the accreditation process to raise the quality standards of our academic and professional offerings. In 1987, partnering with Dr. George Akers, we launched the Institute for Christian Teaching. Its purpose was helping Adventist educators integrate their biblical faith and values with the subjects they teach. After coordinating 40 seminars in many countries of the world, we were able to publish a total of 38 volumes of *Christ in the Classroom*, a series with more than 700 essays in various languages (<http://ict.adventist.org> and <http://fae.adventist.org>).

■ *Which book projects have been favorites?*

For 10 years, I served as contributing editor of the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, produced by the Library of Congress, and several of my articles and essays were published in professional journals. In addition, I edited, with Dr. Fritz Guy, *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives* (Andrews University, 1985, 1987). I believe it to be a positive influence among thoughtful readers. After my retirement, I co-edited, with Dr. L. James Gibson, *Understanding Creation: Questions on Faith and Science* (Pacific Press, 2011), which includes 20 chapters written by specialists. This work has been published in Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. I also co-edited, with Dr. Nancy Vyhmeister, a parallel book, *Always Prepared: Answers to Questions about Our Faith* (Pacific Press, 2012), which is being translated in several languages as well. Both books are useful to Adventist university students and professionals who want to explain and defend their biblical-Christian worldview and beliefs.

■ *You currently direct a consortium called Adventus. What is it, and what need does it fulfill?*

Adventus is a consortium of 13 Adventist universities in Latin America and is supported by the Department of Education of the General Conference. The consortium publishes and distributes academic and professional books written by Adventist authors in Spanish, as well as in English, French, and Portuguese. With more than 400 titles, Adventus (www.adventus21.com) addresses a lack of Spanish-language textbooks in our universities and provides opportunities to publish research conducted by teachers and scholars.

■ *I understand that you've recently published a book on the environment. Can you tell us about it?*

I was happy to serve as co-editor with Drs. Stephen Dunbar and L. James Gibson on *Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care*. I believe it is the first substantial Adventist book on the topic. Its international group of authors answers 23 questions on our responsibility as stewards of our earthly home. Their approaches are various — biblical, educational, ethical, scientific, and theological (www.adventus21.com).

■ *Over the years, you've shown a special interest in Adventists studying in public universities. Why is that?*

My own studies in public and private universities have given me a sense of the opportunities and risks therein. Too many Adventist students abandon their faith and leave our church. The painful loss of bright young men and women led me to recommend in 1987 the establishment of a General Conference working committee, AMiCUS (Adventist Ministry for/with College and University Students). The committee involves Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, the Education Department, and Youth

Ministries. Its purpose is to provide guidance and support to regional initiatives that minister to thousands of Adventist students around the world. Our church loves and needs each one of them. Upon the conclusion of their studies, they can join the Adventist Professionals' Network (<http://apn.adventist.org>) free of charge. APN is a global registry of Adventist professionals that helps those seeking to offer employment or mission assignments locate prepared individuals in any field.

■ *This year, College and University Dialogue celebrates its 25th year of publication. Why did you decide to launch this magazine?*

Dialogue began as part of the AMiCUS project. On a side note, it was the first journal published in parallel editions at the General Conference — English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Addressed to Adventist university students in public colleges and universities, my hope was to encourage them to better know, live, and share their faith while studying in an environment that at times is hostile to biblical beliefs, values, and lifestyle. Through this magazine, I wished to affirm their high value to our faith community, and encourage them to be ambassadors where future world leaders are being trained. I strongly believe that the Adventist message is coherent and life-transforming, and can be presented eloquently and without apology. (<http://dialogue.adventist.org>).

As *Dialogue's* former chief editor (1989-2007), I remember the long hours devoted to this publication as a worthwhile investment. Most new journals have a short life. I am delighted to see that *Dialogue* has at this point reached the average age of its current readers: 25 years old. And some of its essays have been quoted in scholarly publications.

■ *Can you tell us something about your family?*

Julietta and I have been blessed by two children who are now Christian professionals and good parents. Our son, Leroy, is an orthopedic surgeon. Our daughter, Sylvia, holds a doctoral degree in linguistics, and is a university professor and department chair. We have three granddaughters!

■ *You seem to have a very busy life. Should I ask if you have any hobbies?*

I certainly do! Playing the piano and listening to good music. As a young man, I sang in choirs and male quartets, and directed musical groups. My wife and I are interested in cultural travel and have had the privilege of visiting and photographing historical sites in the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. I also try to keep up with issues relating to geology and paleontology, and have a small collection of fossils.

■ *How do you keep healthy and active in your retirement?*

I was a sickly child, but God miraculously restored my health and has protected me through my travels. My parents gave me a living example and wise counsel regarding biblical principles and lifestyle. A plant-based diet, daily physical exercise, and plenty of water help maintain physical health. Friendship with God, being content with what I have, and helping others contribute to a positive outlook on life. Of course, having a good and supportive wife like Julieta is the cherry on top!

■ *What advice would you like to offer to our readers around the world?*

Adventist faith and lifestyle constitute a dynamic and living force that can transform individuals and communities for good. Treasure them both. You are university students, and as such, each of you is part of a very privileged minority — only about 1 percent of the global population.

Make the very best of your opportunity. God has given you many talents, and He has put you on your university campus with a double purpose: to be His special representative, and to prepare for a life of generous service. Fulfill your mission! As you put Christ and His teachings at the center of your life every day, He promises to be your faithful friend and guide (Proverbs 3:5-7). With your priorities straight and your objective clear, you will succeed!

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Continued from page 22

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Zipporah: The voice of silence

by Mario Pereyra

Zipporah chose the destiny of silence, retreating into herself as a mysterious and quiet person. She preferred to hide under the mask of silence, choosing the strategy of being second.

Zipporah means “bird.” Like a bird, she was furtive. Unlike a bird, she was silent. She was the dark-skinned woman behind a splendid husband. But how much influence did Zipporah have on Moses’ life? She definitely played a key role in transforming the effusive and impulsive man she had met in the desert into a formidable, courageous leader and lawgiver, who led Israel out of Egypt’s captivity into the frontiers of the promised land. We have some evidence to think that, to a great extent, the success of Moses was due to the calm and sweet disposition, mixed with counsel, that this quiet woman shared with him for most of his life.

The Bible says very little about Zipporah. The five books of Moses contain only three clear and brief allusions to her (Exodus 2:21-22; 4:24-26; 18). Out of these few references, only one describes Zipporah in a leading role. Why did Moses not write more about her? Why is there no clear recognition of her? Or is it that her most important contribution was silence?

Moses was impulsive in character, explosive in temper, high-flaunting in self-image. Would such a person be the leader God was looking for to accomplish the great task of liberating His people? God chose His own way

of molding Moses, and allowed Moses to go to the desert from the royal courts of Egypt to unlearn what he had learned in the classrooms of the University of Egypt. Among the first lessons he had to learn were patience and humility. No characteristic is so valid in leadership and influence as to be patient with people — their problems, their dreams, their ways — and to show by example that to be leader is to be a servant. Moses did achieve this transformation, and later the Lord Himself paid a great tribute: “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

Through whom did God teach these lessons of patience and humility? Who changed Moses? Was it the desert that hit his pride and taught him humility? Definitely, geography and the shepherd tasks softened his impetus. More importantly, however, human relationships play an effective role in tempering one’s character and steadying one’s purposes in life’s journey. Recent research has shown that certain social relational components — such as empathy; working together; sharing common goals, plans, and expectations — are statistically associated with effecting personality changes.¹ Such components influence a

person to look at issues dispassionately and with care and calmness.

Moses had someone to instill these significant social skills and personality building blocks in his life: his serene, patient, gentle wife Zipporah. To carry out the huge task of leading, organizing, and teaching this rebellious nation, it was crucial to have a soft and calm voice at home. It was at home, with Zipporah, that Moses learned the disciplines of patience, moderation, restraint, discretion, and obedience to God, among many other lessons — disciplines that are essential for effective spiritual leadership.

A determined woman

After 40 years in Midian, Moses and his family went to Egypt to accomplish the mission God had given him (Exodus 3). On their way, there was a dramatic and unexpected event. Moses suffered a sudden and severe illness that they recognized was a punishment from God for not having complied with His commandments: the circumcision of Eliezer, his son.

God was angry, and Zipporah calmed him. The experience of appeasing Moses during so many years helped her to calm even God. Moreover, she was responsible for neglecting the command (the

Midianites saw circumcision as a cruel and brutal act) and assumed the responsibility.

In a valiant move, she took a sharp rock and without hesitation proceeded to perform the surgery without anesthesia — cutting out the foreskin of her first-born — showing herself to be a resolute and bold woman. It must have been an impressive scene to watch her with her bloody hands, defiantly screaming at her husband over the yelling of her son, while she threw the blood-dripping piece of skin at his feet: “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me” (Exodus 4:25).²

The blood of sacrifices offered to God purifies and saves humans. This bloody ritual with his son saved Moses’ life and renewed his marriage vows with Zipporah, through this cruel liturgy that both shared. Zipporah executed the noble ministry of intercession and reconciliation with God. Years later, Moses would exercise the same ministry of intercession: on two occasions, he was ready to offer his life to God in order to save his people from the wickedness of idolatry and rebellion (Exodus 32:10-14; Numbers 14:10-20).

The hidden face of Zipporah

Holes in a story are one of the characteristics of the biblical narrative. In Exodus 18, we find a suggestion that may shed light on the hidden characteristics of our heroine. After some years of separation, Jethro brought Zipporah with her two sons to Israel’s camp. The last time we saw them was on their way to Egypt. Now we discover that Moses “had sent her away and her two sons” (Exodus 18:2). Why did he do so? We have to remember that Moses and his brother Aaron did the negotiation with Pharaoh’s court, and Miriam was supporting them as a leader among women. It is possible that Zipporah perceived she wasn’t very well accepted in her husband’s family, since she was a foreigner with dark skin. She prob-

ably preferred to leave rather than produce discord at critical times.

Zipporah and her sons arrived at the Israelite camp. Moses had not seen them for some time; he was too busy leading Israel out of Egypt. When he heard that his family was coming to join him, “Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent” (Exodus 18:7). There they continued talking in a friendly way, while Zipporah and the children stayed outside, silently suffering Moses’ indifference. It is easy to think that an omission such as this must have been the result of a premeditated, secret plan. What plan? Why should Zipporah not be mentioned?

It is a noteworthy fact that this reunion was prior to the significant social, political, and legal reorganization that Israel experienced during the Exodus. The next day the family arrived, and Jethro advised Moses to share leadership responsibilities, dividing the people by jurisdictions organized hierarchically, with their respective judges, and leaving Moses to solve major disputes that required his intervention. Moses accepted such important changes (Exodus 18:24). Is there a connection between this administrative rearrangement and Zipporah? Definitely so, since, according to Ellen White, she was the one who proposed the idea. “When Zipporah rejoined her husband in the wilderness, she saw that his burdens were wearing away his strength, and she made known her fears to Jethro, who suggested measures for his relief. Here was the chief reason for Miriam’s antipathy to Zipporah.”³ It is difficult to imagine that such a great organizational transformation coming from a woman — not to mention a foreigner — was easily accepted. But it *was* accepted, because the idea was presented through her father Jethro, a respectable man with priestly investiture who came from Abraham’s lineage. Although others may not

have known the Jethro-Zipporah connection, Miriam detected the source of the reorganization that Moses implemented. The problem was that this reorganization removed Aaron and Miriam from power. They had had privileges in the previous system. From now on, their work would be reduced to minor issues.

Zipporah chose the destiny of silence, retreating into herself as a mysterious and quiet person. She preferred to hide under the mask of silence, choosing the strategy of being second. She chose to hide her dark face so that her husband’s face would shine with blinding flashes. She cautiously walked in the stealthy night of a self-imposed mission. We do not see her presence, but we can see her fingerprints, some of them written in blood.

Under circumstances when the fever of “visibility” is part of human nature, it is almost incredible to think about this silent woman, who was trying to get away from the prestige and attention and live an inconspicuous life. Zipporah sought an existence in which she hid her destiny behind her biography. Her humility and greatness are exemplary indeed, and she stands as a model of silent leadership.

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VIEWPOINT

Give them some truth

A parent's testimony on the meaning and relevance of Christian education

by James Standish

It was John Lennon who sang passionately, “Just give me some truth, all I want is the truth.” It didn’t seem too much to ask. And you have to give credit to a man who chased everything, from tripping on LSD to transcendental meditation with the Maharishi, in order to discover his truth. But in the end, it seems his worldview was hopelessly muddled. In “Give Peace a Chance,” he sang against faith; in one of his final songs, “Grow Old with Me,” he sweetly sang, “God bless our love.” So which was it? A material world without God, or a spiritual world with Him? Or did he live in a world where both contradictory truths could coexist simultaneously?

It is, I admit, unfashionable to talk about the idea of truth at all. Our liquid modernity is all about multiple paths, personal truths that have no external calibration, different ideas of right and wrong of equal value, coexisting mutually-exclusive small truths. Truth, they say, is the first casualty of war — and the idea of truth was the first, and most profound, casualty of the Western cultural revolution of the 60s — the results of which continue to reverberate.

When my spouse, Leisa Morton-Standish, was working on her Ph.D. at the University of Maryland, she had a professor who very proudly announced that he no longer saw right and wrong — just shades of grey. I wonder what shade of grey the Holocaust was in his mind? How about the 9/11 terrorist

attack, 7/7, or Bali bombings? I suppose they would be fairly dark shades of grey? What about child molestation or rape, cannibalism or slavery, torture or persecution?

As absurd as the “shades of grey” approach to truth may be when applied at the margins, it is necessary if we abandon the concept of truth. Because if we admit some things are wrong, it implies that some things are equally and unequivocally right. And the idea of a truth that transcends personal experience or cultural prejudice is an anathema to those dedicated to dismantling the old paradigms of Western society — specifically the Christian paradigm.

They’ve done a fabulous job in their quest. At the conclusion of the London riots of 2011, Britain went through a period of intense soul searching. Why did people from all backgrounds join in the rampage of theft and destruction? Many possible causes were provided, but chief among them was the widespread abandonment of the idea of right and wrong — the idea of a truth that transcends the moment or the individual.

Similarly, the sexual anarchy that has become endemic in the western world is based on a simple idea: as long as people want to do it, it’s fine to do. Of course, the subsequent explosion in sexually-transmitted diseases, unstable family structures, abuse of children (which is particularly prevalent when the man in the house is not the father of the children), and

the other tragedies that have followed have destroyed millions of lives and sapped the strength of our society. But what’s odd is that even though these results of bad — dare I say wrong — behaviors are readily critiqued in polite society, the sexual anarchy that ensures the devastating outcomes is, for many, beyond reproach.

Truth our guide

But not everyone has bought into this brave new liquid reality, in which truth regarding anything other than physical reality is not only elusive, but nonexistent. Not everyone believes all moral codes are equally valid. Not everyone has adopted the intellectually-sloppy practice of proclaiming mutually-exclusive claims to be simultaneously equally valid. Not everyone believes that every question of morality and spirituality floats within an amorphous grey mist. Some of us still believe in a knowable right and wrong, an immutable guide to morality, that spiritual and moral truths are the most important truths of all, and their understanding and following is our guide.

And that is the primary reason I, as a parent, turn to Adventist education, whether it is primary, secondary, or tertiary. The moment Christian education loses its unique worldview, it loses its reason to exist. When it embraces its essential defining character, it is irreplaceable.

That isn’t to say that as a parent I want my children inculcated in a

simplistic worldview that fails to present nuance, complexity, argument, and counter argument. A rigorous education requires the development of complex analytical thinking. And that can only be done by exploring the questions, the strengths, and the weaknesses.

However, in the Adventist setting, this exploration must occur within the context of the Christian paradigm, just as the exploration in secular universities occurs unquestionably in a materialist paradigm. If I wanted my children exploring complex questions within a materialist paradigm, I'd save myself the money and send them to secular settings. We sacrifice, not because we want simplicity, therefore, but because we want the complexity of life to be explored from a Christian perspective, within the Christian paradigm.

Of course, we are not just looking to Christian education to provide perspective; we are also looking for two other critical aspects. The first is a quality academic experience. The second is a nurturing, individualistic environment.

I must admit to being a bit of a fatalist when it comes to academic performance. I was shuffled through nine schools during my K–12 education. To make things a little more complex, those schools were in five nations on three continents. This rather incoherent education apparently didn't disadvantage me tremendously, if at all. And I suppose it may have enriched it.

I received my MBA from the University of Virginia's prestigious Darden Graduate School of Management and later graduated from one of the best law schools in the U.S., with honors. I suppose I could have done better academically if I'd gone to elite schools, but I somewhat doubt it. The kids I knew in Adventist schools who were motivated and had academic ability did as well as you'd expect them to do — lawyers, doctors,

academics, business people, and so on. I am, therefore, not a believer that the school makes an enormous difference in the academic/career trajectory of students.

Ideal education

My ideal education in primary school would involve competent teachers ensuring basic skills — reading, writing, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division — and then lots of time to explore anything else the student likes. It would involve absolutely no homework — as studies suggest it's a waste of time and makes life miserable. Most importantly, it prevents kids from doing what they do best: playing, exploring, and imagining.

The future belongs to those who can think creatively — think Steve Jobs — not to those who can replicate accurately — think factory workers. The world is wide open for problem-solvers and big dreamers. I hope my children will be able to experience that in their education.

Along with that, one of the greatest strengths of Christian education is that the schools tend to be smaller. As such, students don't generally get lost in the crowd. That is a feature that I appreciated as a student, and one that I now greatly appreciate as the parent of students. I appreciate that all the teachers at my girls' primary school know their name. I appreciate that children from the lowest to the highest grades all know each other. No one is a nobody. Every individual counts. May it ever be so in Adventist education. Education on an industrial scale is not superior to a handcrafted product.

Before closing, it's worth noting that it is critical that all schools take into account the reality of two-career families. It would be helpful, for example, if schools offered popular activities as an after-school option — swimming, gymnastics, music lessons, ballet, soccer, a foreign language, etc. — to alleviate the burden on working

parents. In addition, such programs might attract children from the community and should be profitable. For example, my children currently attend an after-school French program and an after-school ballet program at the Anglican school near our home. But it is so much easier for working parents when after-school programs run at the school. The same goes for vacation-care programs.

Conclusion

I am not only satisfied, I am delighted with the education my children are currently receiving at an Adventist school. The school has a great Christ-infused culture, the academics are solid, and it provides a wonderful, nurturing environment. I'd be even more delighted if they outlawed homework! I wish every child in the world could experience the kind of education they are enjoying.

James Standish (J.D., Georgetown University; MBA, University of Virginia) writes from Sydney, Australia, as a parent whose children are studying in a Seventh-day Adventist school. He is the director of communications and public affairs of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists and is the editor of the *Adventist Record*. This testimony was originally published in *TEACH Journal of Christian Education*, published by the South Pacific Division. Reprinted by permission. E-mail: jamesstandish@adventistmedia.org.au.

INTERCHANGE

Expand your friendship network

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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

Some things never change — such as *Dialogue's* mission and focus. Other things, though, are updated and enhanced — such as new ways in which you can access *Dialogue*. We want you to know that *Dialogue* is now available online, in addition to the regular printed format. The journal can be accessed at: dialogue.adventist.org. At the *Dialogue* site, you will have the opportunity **to read all of the articles, from the very beginning of *Dialogue* to the present.** Additionally, you can read the articles in any of the four languages in which *Dialogue* is published.

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