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Tattoos of the heart

Seventh-day Adventists
and their beliefs

Ellen White and the
matter of competition



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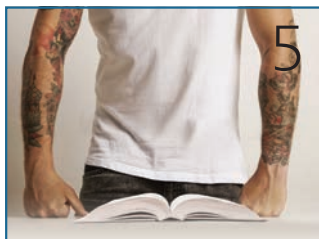
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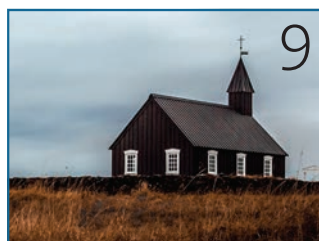
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More than a skin-deep tattoo, God promises to write His law, the law of love, into human hearts and minds. This is the right motivation for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath—as a loving response and intelligent act of worship.

by Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THEIR BELIEFS

A doctrine is a statement of belief that a group of believers make and hold to be true. No religious body can exist or begin to function without a core doctrinal system that is accepted by the adherents of that body.

by John M. Fowler



ELLEN WHITE AND THE MATTER OF COMPETITION

Ultimately, the remedy for competition and rivalry is to receive the Spirit of Christ and to place God at the center of life. Your energy and efficiency in the upbuilding of My kingdom, Jesus says, depend upon your receiving of My Spirit.

by John Wesley Taylor V

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THINGS LEFT IN THE FIRE

King Nebuchadnezzar was gripped by delusions of grandeur—something that would haunt him throughout his life. Through the dream in Daniel 2, God had clearly revealed that he and his kingdom of Babylon were only the head of gold in the “great image” (Daniel 2:31, KJV). But no, Nebuchadnezzar refused to accept the fact that he was passing through life like every other human walking the earth. He determined to make his presence known as permanent throughout the kingdom. Making a direct reference to the dream, Nebuchadnezzar commissioned a massive statue, made entirely of gold. He was sure that the dream had it wrong, that God was mistaken in saying that he was only the head of gold.

The assembly was called. High officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, provincial officials were there. The orders were clear. They were to bow down before the golden image when the orchestra struck. The scene must have been powerful and ominous. Amidst a sea of people kissing the floor, three young men were standing up. King Nebuchadnezzar took it as a personal affront and asserted, “What god will be able to save you from my power?” (Daniel 3:15, NLT).¹ The answer they gave has been the central theme of many a sermon, and yet it bears reflection. The *New Living Translation* renders it: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if He doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up” (Daniel 3:16–18).

These were brave young men! Their words only served to enrage the king even more. They were tied and thrown into a fiery furnace that had been heated seven times more than usual. So hot was the fire, that those who were throwing the Hebrews into the furnace died. And here’s one of the important lessons. They were bound by the circumstances, strapped with the bonds of unacceptance, tied with ropes to test their spiritual loyalty. Their hands and feet were bound! Have you ever felt as if your hands and feet were bound? I find it quite powerful that those who were “some of the strongest men of his army” still died because of the fire. The instrument the king had chosen to attack the children of God turned and “slew those men” (Daniel 3:23, KJV). In *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White wrote: “The Lord did not forget His own. As His witnesses were cast into the furnace, the Saviour revealed Himself to them in person, and together

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they walked in the midst of the fire. In the presence of the Lord of heat and cold, the flames lost their power to consume.”²

When we go through trials, the tendency is to feel alone. But if I have learned anything from this story, it is that when things heat up, Jesus is there right in the middle of the heat with us. And moreover, those who are testing us will see that He is with us. In the biblical account, Nebuchadnezzar comes to the entrance of the furnace . . . hold on! There’s something baffling here! A few minutes before, they had had to remove the bodies of the strongest men of his army who had thrown Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace. But now Nebuchadnezzar gets close to the furnace, and nothing happens! What’s that all about? I’d like to suggest that at this very moment, even in the middle of his disbelief, King Nebuchadnezzar is receiving the benefit of the spiritual blessing that those he intended to harm were receiving. Interesting! Through our faithfulness, God may bless those who intend to harm us!

Lastly, something special happened as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked out of the furnace. The Bible tacitly teaches us something here. If you compare the things the three young men were thrown in with and the things that came out with them, something is missing. I invite you to carefully read the story, taking special care in comparing Daniel 3:20 and 21

and Daniel 3:26 and 27. I ask you now, what were the only things left in the fire? And what are the things you and I need to leave in the fire? What are the things that Jesus must remove from you and me?

The biggest lesson I get from this story, in this context, is that when I am thrown into the fiery furnace and Jesus joins me there, the only things that are removed are those that tie me down. May it also be that those who are trying to harm me will come to understand that He is able. But even if He chooses not to act, like the three young men, I resolve to remain faithful. How about you? 🙏

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2. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1917), 508.



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ESSAY

TATTOOS OF THE HEART

More than a skin-deep tattoo, God promises to write His law, the law of love, into human hearts and minds. This is the right motivation for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath—as a loving response and intelligent act of worship.

LISA M. BEARDSLEY-HARDY

In 1769, Captain James Cook of the British Royal Navy documented the practice of *tatau* among the tribesmen of the Tahitian Islands during a voyage to the South Pacific. He transliterated the word *tatau* into English as *tattoo*. According to Elisha Belden, tattooing in the Western world at that time was nonexistent, the practice having been banned by Pope Hadrian I since the mid-700's¹ because it was “deemed sacrilegious to disfigure or alter God’s likeness [the human body] by placing permanent marks on the body.”² People in Christian cultures assimilated this idea and avoided tattooing themselves. In parts of Asia the practice was avoided because of its association with criminality.

Today tattoos are no longer seen as the exotica of Polynesia or the mark of convicts and sailors. They have become fashionable and trendy for both men and women, from entertainers to athletes to rather ordinary people. In 2021, there were 31,196 tattoo artists’ businesses in the United States (U.S.).³ A 2021 survey in the U.S. found that 41 percent of Millennials (born between 1981-1996) had one or more tattoos.⁴ In Italy in 2018, 48

percent of people reported being tattooed, followed by 47 percent in Sweden and 46 percent in the U.S. In the U.K., 65 percent of employers reported that they actually preferred tattooed employees in beauty industry careers.⁵

The practice of body markings by means of inking goes back in time across cultures. Egyptian mummies from the pre-Pharaoh period more than 5,000 years ago have been found with tattoos.⁶ Female mummies from the later New Kingdom period (circa 1570–1069 B.C.) were found to have tattoos such as the Eye of Horus symbolizing protection.⁷ In addition to serving as a protective amulet, tattooing appears to have also had a decorative purpose for Egyptian women of all social classes.⁸

In Amazigh Berber culture, a tattoo is called *jedwel*, meaning “talisman.” Tattoos on Amazigh women are thought to invoke magical protection from bad spirits and the evil eye, signal fertility, adorn the woman, and indicate group membership.⁹ Tattooing, however, is in decline among the Berbers as the practice is considered *haram* or forbidden by Islam, not only because of permanently altering the body but also because of the

images of anything animate that they might portray.

Elsewhere in the world: The Japanese word *irezumi* means “inserting ink,” and *horimono* is a full-body tattoo with a single, unified traditional Japanese design that begins on the back and can extend to the chest, shoulders, and legs.¹⁰ Tattoos are still valued to convey socioreligious identity in Maori culture in New Zealand and among Samoans. Also, in India, millions are tattooed in order to express clan affiliation, religious symbolism, and Hindu values. This major religion does not disallow the practice—indeed, with thousands of god-images available to the Hindus, expression of religion through tattooing is without limit for them.

In sub-Saharan Africa, scarification is similar to tattooing. Garve et al. found that scarification was performed to signify “permanent visible and irrevocable membership” in a community.¹¹ It may indicate the merits or status of a person, commemorate significant life experiences, be the result of medical treatment, or be thought to enhance the hardiness and attractiveness of the person.

In the U.S. and other individualistic countries, developing and expressing one’s unique individuality is a powerful motivation to get a tattoo. Reef Karim, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles commented on the psychological reasons why people may get tattooed in the U.S. today. These reasons include “attention, self-expression, artistic freedom, rebellion, a visual display of a personal narrative, reminders of spiritual/cultural traditions, sexual motivation, addiction, identification with a group or even drunken impulsiveness.”¹² Dr. Karim further observed, “Our current society craves individuality and self-expression. . . . We don’t have to talk, we just have to look. Our bodies have become the refrigerator magnets of quotes, sayings and reminders.” For a few, tattooing becomes an addiction. According to another author, it may be “a cry for permanence in an impermanent world; or the search for external identity where an internal sense of this is shaky.”¹³

During World War II, forcible tattooing was imposed on detainees in the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Monowitz, where they were stripped of their name in exchange for a number inked into the arm, treated as though they were branded animals.¹⁴ Due to the lack of volition and health risks, scarification or tattooing of babies and children should not be practiced today.¹⁵

THE BIBLICAL POSITION

Is the biblical command, “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves” (Leviticus 19:28, NIV),¹⁶ still relevant today? In an article entitled “Why Does the Bible Forbid Tattoos?”¹⁷ Livia Gershon suggests that the prohibition was in opposition to the Egyptian practice of branding captives and slaves with

the name of a god, “marking them as belongings of the priests or pharaoh.” Devotees of a god could also voluntarily elect to be branded with the name of the god that they worshiped as a sign of submission. She points to Isaiah 44:5 to describe the children of Jacob committing themselves to God where, “Some will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’ . . . still others will write on their hand ‘The LORD’s.’”¹⁸ One might wonder whether this means a tattoo, but if it did, would it be acceptable to get a tattoo if it spells out “The LORD’s” or features a Christian symbol?¹⁸ Does the problem derive from what symbol is portrayed, or from the process and outcome?

Moses has been recognized as the first public-health officer, with a health code given to him by God to promote the health and well-being of the people he led out of Egypt through unsanitary desert conditions for 40 years. Does this prohibition still apply where hygienic instruments can be used under sterile conditions? What if the person who wants the tattoo is of age to decide and is not under the influence of alcohol or drugs? What if tattooing is done for a good reason such as re-creating eyebrows for a cancer patient?¹⁹

In the case of scarification, the affected area may be rubbed with soil, clay, plants, or dung to deliberately cause infection so as to create raised keloid scars. But even in Western tattoo parlors using modern instruments, tattooing can cause non-communicable conditions such as scarring, keloid scars, and granulomas, MRI image distortion and, rarely, skin discomfort and complications from the strong magnetic field of the MRI,²⁰ as well as allergy to the tattoo dyes even years later. Acute risks include infectious diseases from bacteria and viruses including MRSA²¹; *clostridium tetani*, which is the causative agent of tetanus; hepatitis; and even HIV.²² Local skin infections include abscesses, cutaneous diphtheria, erythema, necrotizing fasciitis or tissue necrosis, pustules, and cellulitis, among other infections. Systemic infection may cause endocarditis and septic shock.²³ Viral hepatitis is a risk factor for the later development of hepatocellular carcinoma.²⁴ There are risks even in the best of settings because the inks themselves may be contaminated, toxic, or possibly carcinogenic.²⁵ Tattoos fade because the pigments are excreted or migrate to other parts of the body such as to the lymph nodes. Long-term risks include phototoxicity, possible substance migration, and metabolic conversion of tattoo ink ingredients into toxic substances, and cleavage of pigments into hazardous compounds by laser-assisted removal of tattoos.²⁶

What about the concern that the practice is associated with now-forgotten rituals associated with death in the Ancient Near East? Scholars John Huehnergard and Ancient-Israel expert Harold Liebowitz rather viewed the biblical prohibition to be in reaction to tattooing being “the symbol of servitude” of Egypt, and later

during the rabbinic period, as associated with paganism.²⁷ Nevertheless, tattoos are connected with belief in an afterlife in many cultures and religions even today.²⁸ And what harm is there in having a tattoo that proclaims your religious beliefs?

THE BIBLE AND OUR BODIES

Perhaps the real issue is not whether there is outright harm in having a tattoo. Rather, consider what Scripture says about our bodies and the psychological and spiritual space occupied by tattoos.

First, the Mosaic health laws were instituted to promote wholistic wellbeing. Furthermore, the plain instruction of 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 20 is that our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit.” We are not our own. We ought to care for our health and honor God with our bodies.

For those who might regret already having gotten a tattoo, removing tattoos itself carries health risks.²⁹ Paul’s practical counsel about circumcision bears reflection: “Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. Each person should remain in the situation which they were in when God called them” (1 Corinthians 7:18–20).

Second, one way or another, humans display group affiliation by means of visible signs—by the clothes worn and countless other signals. God has designated a *time-embedded* visible sign to indicate whether we love and are loyal to Him when we remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8). This “sign” gives the non-conformist a truly noble cause for which to stand (Exodus 31:17; Ezekiel 20:20). Keeping the Sabbath signifies belief in God as Creator. It affirms that God is the One who delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and the One who still delivers from the slavery of sin and the punishment of death. Sabbath observance acknowledges that it is the Lord and not someone else who sanctifies and redeems.


In Revelation 13:16, the endtime beast power will also imprint a sign or a mark on those who worship the beast. This sign is not a tattoo or a vaccination card. Rather, it shows submission to the beast, even as keeping the seventh-day Sabbath shows allegiance and submission to the Creator.

More than a skin-deep tattoo, God promises to write His law, the law of love, into human hearts and minds.³⁰ This is the right motivation for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath—as a loving response and intelligent act of worship. During the pandemic, Sabbath school and worship was forced onto Zoom and the Internet. Where public worship services have resumed,

hymns and choirs have been muffled by face masks or in some places silenced altogether. With a heart and mind inscribed by the love and law of God, let us renew our witness and show allegiance to God, together in company with others who are loyal to Him. This is a message Seventh-day Adventists are to proclaim in word and deed through their various ministries, both online and in person.

Third, we do not need a talisman, amulet, or inked symbol to protect us from the evil eye, the evil one, or even death itself. Day and night, throughout all the seasons of life, God is enough to meet all of our needs for protection and to provide everything else we need, as well. The assurance of God’s compassion and watch-care are repeated throughout Scripture. His promises to be present, to protect, and to help were given to Noah, to Abraham, to the Hebrew people, to Joshua, to David, to Solomon, to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, to Micah, to His disciples—and these same promises extend to you and me.³¹ When we crave a visible reminder of the depth of His love, we can look to Christ on the cross, consider the scars on His hands, and hear the words from Isaiah 49:16: “See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

Starting with Psalm 120, the “songs of ascents” were thought to be sung by pilgrims as they ascended up the slope and steps to the temple in Jerusalem for yearly festivals. Jerusalem is surrounded by seven mountain peaks³² and across the Jordan, covered in haze, is Mount Nebo, where Moses died within eyesight of the Promised Land. While my mother was still alive, suffering and slowly dying from Parkinson’s disease, I would read to her one of those psalms, Psalm 121, but replace the name of “Israel” with her name. Whatever the dangers, and even if death should overtake us on the way, God is a sure refuge:

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel [over you!] will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
the LORD will watch over your coming
and going both now and forevermore.” 

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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THEIR BELIEFS

JOHN M. FOWLER

A doctrine is a statement of belief that a group of believers make and hold to be true. No religious body can exist or begin to function without a core doctrinal system that is accepted by the adherents of that body.

If you want war, nourish a doctrine.”—William Graham Sumner.

Students of church history can verify the truthfulness or otherwise of this statement. But if we think the war is over, we are sadly mistaken. The battlegrounds may have shifted; we may not have any great synods or powerful kings or dominant bishops leading the fight over this doctrine or that dogma. Just the same, the war is still being fought in many denominations, including Adventism, where the battles occur in Sabbath school classes, in camp meetings, as well as in tabloid and scholarly publications.

In a Sabbath school class discussion recently, I watched one such battle that pitted doctrine against salvation. The questions raised were disturbing: Do we need doctrines for our salvation? Is Jesus not sufficient? Is commitment to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs a prerequisite for baptism? The discussion was vigorous, but, like so many others, yielded more heat than light.

Nevertheless, the issue of doctrine and its place in Christian redemptive experience is an important one and deserves careful consideration. We can perhaps approach this issue by raising four questions: What is a doctrine? Is Jesus a person or a doctrine? Is doctrine essential for salvation? Should the acceptance of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs a prerequisite for baptism and acceptance into the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

WHAT IS A DOCTRINE?

A doctrine is a statement of belief that a group of believers make and hold to be true. No religious body can exist or begin to function without a core doctrinal system that is accepted by the adherents of that body. And to raise the question as to whether a religious body, such as a church, needs doctrine is to ask the obvious. Of course, it does. The kind of doctrine it holds defines its nature, mission, and purpose.

Take the concept of God, for example. Many statements can be made about God. One could say that God is the absolute mind, from which all ideas emanate. That is a doctrinal statement. Whether the doctrine is right or not, those who embrace that teaching have a certain perception of God that defines their life, mission, and purpose. Another person could say that God is the ultimate good from which all sense of ethics and

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aesthetics flow. Those who accept that as their doctrine of God may insist that as long as they do some good in life, to that extent they are participating in the will and the way of God.

Still another person could say that God is an absolute impersonal force, permeating all nature, both animate and inanimate. Those who hold such a belief may look at life as a continual cyclic process, without beginning or end, ever seeking to become part of this absolute force. In this process, there is neither birth nor death, neither joy nor pain, neither here nor there.

Someone else could deny the existence of God altogether. That, too, would constitute a doctrine—the doctrine of atheism. Hundreds of people build their edifice upon such a doctrine and lead a life without feeling any need to recognize a supreme being.

Then someone else might say that God is a person—infinite in wisdom, love, and power, and that He has chosen any need to create humanity in His own image. Indeed, this God is so loving that when humanity chose to rebel against Him, His love sought after them in the person of a Son who made the infinite sacrifice of dying on a cross to save them from sin.

The last statement about God is quite different from the previous ones; those who accept it would relate to God on a personal basis, accepting His Son as their Savior. The belief system, the worship practice, the relational structure, the ethical norms flowing out of each of these statements about God would be quite different. Without considering the rightness or the wrongness of each doctrinal statement, one can easily see the importance of doctrine in anchoring one's belief, practice, and purpose.

JESUS AND DOCTRINE

The moment they take the name of Jesus, some Christians immediately go on the offensive. “Jesus is all we need,” they say. “Don’t confuse us with doctrines.” One cannot quarrel with the first part of that statement: Jesus is certainly all we need. The Bible says so: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NKJV).*

But when it comes to the statement “Don’t confuse us with doctrines,” the problems mount. For example, which Jesus? Is He the prophet that Muslims accept? Is He the great teacher, a good man, one of the many incarnations of the Absolute Force that Hindus worship? Is He the model person that humanists project? Or is He the myth that must be rejected in order that the profound moral teachings of the Gospels may emerge as the lofty ideal for humanity?

This immediately suggests the need for a definition of Jesus. We must let the Bible define Jesus. He is God. Being God, He took upon Himself human flesh. In that flesh He bore our sins, died for our sins, rose victorious over sin, ascended to sit on the right hand of the Father to be our High Priest, and will soon come again to take us where He is. That is the definition the Bible gives, and most Christians would accept that as a basic foundation of their faith. To make that statement, to confess that belief, is the purpose of the doctrine of Christ. Theologians call it Christology. Without that doctrinal clarification, we won't know which Jesus we are worshipping.

It's not a question of Jesus versus doctrine. The issue, rather, is the need for a statement of truth about the person of Jesus so that those who trust in Jesus will know the Person in whom they place their trust.

DOCTRINE AND SALVATION

Can one be saved by believing in a doctrine? The answer is obvious. John Wesley is reported to have said that “the devils believe, and still remain devils.” Theoretically, knowing Jesus, even the Jesus of the Bible, is not going to save anyone. Knowing that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen make water is not going to save a person dying of thirst. No, he or she needs to drink that water.

So, with Jesus. Correctness of knowledge about Him will not save anyone. Salvation is a result of accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior—coming to Him, placing our lives in His trust, walking as He walked, living as He lived, abiding in Him without any deviation or hesitation. All by His grace and power.

If salvation is accepting Jesus and through His grace overcoming sin, do we need the doctrine of Jesus? Absolutely. For we want to make sure that we go to the right Jesus. In other words, the doctrine of Christ tells us who Jesus is, what He has done, and what kind of relationship He wants to establish with us. After knowing that kind of Jesus, I must make my choice and hand over my life to Him. He gives me salvation, and He leads me through.

Upon my acceptance of Him as my Savior, I am baptized into His body—the fellowship of other believers who have accepted Him before me.

BAPTISM AND THE 28 FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

In recent times, some Adventists have expressed their discomfort with making acceptance of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs a prerequisite for baptism. The discomfort largely arises from their dissection of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs into two parts: the Christian

core and the Adventist essentials. They would go so far as to say that baptism into the body of Christ requires only the acceptance of the Christian core. After baptism, the Adventist essentials should be taught to those baptized in order that they might become full-fledged members of the Adventist Church.

I find such dichotomy between baptism into Christ and entry into the Seventh-day Adventist Church untenable. It assumes that the two are different. If we go back to 1844 and accept the stand of our pioneers that in God's own way and time, He raised up a body of people conscious of their commitment to the Jesus of the cross and the Jesus of the eschaton, we will realize that the pioneers made no difference between being the body of Christ and being Seventh-day Adventists. Long before the latter name was coined, the pioneers recognized themselves as the true body of Christ, taking upon themselves that prophetic term *remnant*, defined as those who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

The name "Seventh-day Adventist" does not create a body distinct and exclusive from the Body of Christ. Rather, it calls for faithfulness to the full teachings and lifestyle involved in the Body of Christ. Read again the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Which ones shall we leave aside as of post-baptismal importance, to not be taught for entry into the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Which ones shall we consider as Adventist essentials? The question is not that easy. The so-called Adventist particulars in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs are particulars only to the extent that the other churches over the centuries have neglected, ignored, or altered certain cardinal truths that were the heritage of the New Testament Church. It fell to the Adventist pioneers to discover and reaffirm their commitment to the full teaching of the Bible.

Take, for example, the doctrines of the Sabbath, baptism by immersion, and Christian behavior. Are they not also Christian essentials? Are they not part of the life of the New Testament church? If we say that Sabbath keeping is not essential for baptism, we send out a questioning message, one that ultimately compromises the entire doctrinal corpus of Scripture.

Some Christians, including Adventists, would argue that the New Testament requirement for baptism was simply "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31). True enough. And so should it be today. But we must remember that in the first century, to believe in Jesus and to claim Him as Lord and Savior was to make an awesome choice that made the difference between life and death. Such a choice, on the one hand, placed a Christian against the religious establishment of the day; and, on the other, pitted the Christian against a Roman

establishment that recognized only Caesar as Lord. It was not an easy choice to make. In fact, a first-century Christian made that choice knowing that the result could well be persecution or death.

Moreover, the early church did not have to debate about other particulars of Christian life. They had no problem about Sabbath or baptism or the state of the dead. The New Testament witnesses to the observance of Sabbath (Luke 4:16; 23:56; Acts 13:14; 17:1,2; 18:4), the practice of baptism (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38, 39), and safeguarding the body as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Not until later in history, with the onslaught of Greek philosophy and the intrusion of alien cultures, did church leadership succumb to foreign doctrines, such as salvation by works, Sunday worship, infant baptism, and the immortality of the soul.

Revival of these biblical emphases by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the mid-1800s did not make them "Adventist particulars," useful only for entry into the Adventist Church, any more than Luther's discovery of justification by faith was a Lutheran emphasis useful only for entry into the Lutheran Church. The point to note in either case is discovery and recovery of truth. The doctrines that may appear peculiar to Adventists must be looked at from that mode of discovery and recovery so that what we teach as Adventists is biblical truth in all its fullness.

Viewed thus, we will not speak about two modes of truth: one to enter the Christian body through baptism, and the other to grow into the Adventist Church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is Christ's body. If it applies to itself the description of the endtime church—"those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12), it does so not to assume an arrogance of exclusivism but to affirm total commitment to the Person, the message, and the mission of Jesus, who did come and who is soon coming again.

The 28 Fundamental Beliefs are not varied statements of doctrines, but expressions of truth as it is in Jesus, and He affects the life and lifestyle of His followers. Every doctrinal expression must be Christ-centered; otherwise, it has neither relevance nor use for the Christian. ☩

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ELLEN WHITE AND THE MATTER OF COMPETITION



JOHN WESLEY TAYLOR V

Ultimately, the remedy for competition and rivalry is to receive the Spirit of Christ and to place God at the center of life. Your energy and efficiency in the upbuilding of My kingdom, Jesus says, depend upon your receiving of My Spirit.

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When we hear the word *competition*, we often think of the sports arena. While this is a tangible example, perhaps we should consider the larger picture. In doing so, we are not alone. While Ellen White addressed the matter of rivalry on the playing field,¹ she wrote more frequently of competition within the context of living. We will examine Ellen White's assessment of competition within this more comprehensive framework.²

Competition can be defined as "striving to gain or win something by defeating or establishing superiority over others."³ It is most often equated with the term *rivalry*.⁴ Similarly, Ellen White described competition as strife for supremacy⁵ and the desire to be first.⁶ She also used the terms *competition* and *rivalry* interchangeably.⁷

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

Ellen White often referenced Scripture in discussing competition and rivalry. She noted that Lucifer's desire for self-exaltation "brought strife into the heavenly courts" (see Isaiah 14:13).⁸ She identified the spirit of rivalry between Jacob and Esau⁹ that led to deception (Genesis 25:29–34; 27), and noted that Jacob's later life "was embittered by the rivalry between the sister-wives," Leah and Rachel.¹⁰

Christ encountered "a spirit of rivalry" among His disciples as they argued who would be the greatest in the kingdom.¹¹ Describing Christ's endeavors to cultivate a spirit of humility and selfless service in His followers, Ellen White added, "This lesson is for us."¹²

Paul's metaphor equating ancient races and the Christian life (1 Corinthians 9:24–27) is a passage that Ellen White frequently referenced, noting comparison and contrast. On the one hand, Paul invited believers to imitate the competitors' commitment to obtain the prize.¹³ On the other, he drew a distinction between the popular contests, where only one received the prize, and the heavenly race, where the winning of one does not detract from that of another.¹⁴

CORPORATE SETTINGS

Ellen White discussed competition and rivalry within different contexts, both corporate and personal. She maintained that denominational institutions should not compete. "There is to be no rivalry among the Lord's institutions," she stated.¹⁵ When some church members started a sanitarium in Colorado, for instance, to compete with the institution already established, she wrote, "[The Lord] bids that this miserable work of rivalry be brought to a close."¹⁶

Ellen White also affirmed that church institutions should not seek to rival non-denominational entities. "Never are we, in the establishment of institutions, to try to compete with worldly institutions in size or

splendor."¹⁷ Another instance was the rivalry that arose between the Adventist publishing houses. "My heart is sick, grieved, disappointed," she wrote. "A contemptible spirit of rivalry, a spirit of seeking for supremacy, prevails in the Pacific Press and the Review and Herald publishing houses."¹⁸ One way in which these institutions competed was by increasing the number of illustrations in the materials published, which significantly increased their cost.¹⁹ "There should be no rivalry between our publishing houses," Ellen White declared.²⁰

Regarding the typical school, Ellen White asked, "What is the trend of the education given?" to which she replied, "To self-seeking." This "appeal to emulation and rivalry," she warned, "fosters selfishness, the root of all evil." In God's plan for education, however, there was to be no place for such rivalry.²¹

Similarly, she advised Sabbath school leaders not to seek to "keep up the interest by offering prizes," cautioning that this "offering of rewards will create rivalry, envy, and jealousy." Further, these contests will bring "too great a strain upon the ambitious child, while the rest become discouraged."²²

PERSONAL CONTEXTS

It was not only rivalry among and within denominational entities that concerned Ellen White, but competition among individuals, especially gospel workers. "Not a particle of strife or rivalry should exist between the workers. The work is one, superintended by one Leader."²³ To ministers, she wrote, "Among the shepherds of God's flock there must be no rivalry."²⁴ Church members were also warned against entering into a spirit of rivalry.²⁵

In business relations, for example, Ellen White observed that some connected with the church drove sharp bargains and were viewed by non-believers as "keenest competitors for advantage in trade." Although these church members may have thought that they were benefiting the work through greater tithes and offerings, "their sharpness has rendered them useless in strengthening the church" and "the work has been greatly hindered."²⁶

Ellen White also wrote regarding competition and rivalry within the family. "To compete with their neighbors and church members in matters of dress and display is the sin of many parents," she affirmed, alerting that this would result in "the ruin of their children."²⁷ Such competition was evidenced in the way parents dressed their children and in the way they furnished and decorated the home.²⁸

Ellen White even found it necessary to caution her own children regarding the dangers of rivalry. "Edson," she wrote, "I wish to caution you about getting up a spirit of rivalry. God is using Willie, and He is pleased to use you. Work in perfect harmony in your different branches of the work, and let no spirit of jealousy or seeking for the supremacy come in."²⁹

RESULTS OF COMPETITION AND RIVALRY

Ellen White pointed out the consequences of cherishing a spirit of competition and rivalry. This “spirit of strife for the mastery,” she warned, will create disunity and “cause difference and contention.”³⁰ Some will become suspicious and jealous. She pointed to the net effect: “The great weakness in the churches is the result of the spirit of rivalry, of seeking to be first.”³¹

First, spiritual life is affected. Those who love the sharp competitive practices of the world, Ellen White declared, “have lost their spiritual eyesight.”³² On another occasion, she wrote: “The spirit of rivalry . . . will hurt and finally ruin every soul who engages in it.”³³

The church’s Christian witness is also compromised. As a result of these keen competitors, the world “has to a large degree lost the conviction that Seventh-day Adventists are a people peculiarly loyal to God.”³⁴ Not only is the truth misrepresented and the cause of God disgraced,³⁵ but the spirit of rivalry “will crowd out the missionary spirit.”³⁶

Tragically, when rivalry takes place, the Holy Spirit is grieved, ministering angels are banished, and God cannot bless.³⁷ To state, however, the matter affirmatively, “When the laborers have an abiding Christ in their own souls, when all selfishness is dead, when there is no rivalry, no strife for the supremacy, when oneness exists, when they sanctify themselves, so that love for one another is seen and felt, then the showers of grace of the Holy Spirit will . . . surely come upon them.”³⁸

THE REMEDY

While Ellen White directly addressed their perils, competition and rivalry were a minor theme in her writings. Her emphasis was on the antidote—cooperation, unity, and a spirit of selfless service. Indeed, she referred to *cooperation* 10 times more frequently than to *competition* and *rivalry* combined, and to *unity* and *service* even more often. What did she say?

“Not consolidation, not rivalry or criticism,” Ellen White asserted, “but co-operation, is God’s plan for His institutions.”³⁹ Regarding education, she wrote, “Co-operation should be the spirit of the schoolroom, the law of its life.”⁴⁰ Gospel workers were instructed, “There should be frequent councils and earnest, wholehearted co-operation.”⁴¹ Regardless of the situation, “Co-operation and unity are essential to a harmonious whole.”⁴²

Seeking for harmony and unity is key. When there is “a decided effort, not for rivalry, not to exalt self, but to harmonize with others,” Ellen White penned, “self sinks out of sight and Christ is exalted.”⁴³ Pointing to the goal of unity, she asked, “What do we see? A selfish competition among brethren. . . . Should not the fact that we are saved by the measureless sacrifice of the Son

of God be enough to cause us to draw together in the bonds of unity and love?”⁴⁴

Countermeasures to the spirit of competition and rivalry are found in the attributes of humility, grace, and love. Ellen White wrote that when we are partakers of divine grace, “[t]hen there will be no rivalry, no self-seeking, no desire for the highest place.”⁴⁵ On another occasion she added, “In every line of service all rivalry must be quenched. Heart must be bound to heart. Christian love must be manifested.”⁴⁶

Ultimately, the remedy for competition and rivalry is to receive the Spirit of Christ and to place God at the center of life. “Your energy and efficiency in the upbuilding of My kingdom, Jesus says, depend upon your receiving of My Spirit. . . . Then there will be no rivalry, no self-seeking, no desire for the highest place.”⁴⁷ When “the Lord is regarded as the great Center,” Ellen White affirmed, there will be “no division, no perilous rivalry, but a mutual connection and dependence” that will yield “a harmony akin to the harmony of heaven.”⁴⁸

May our lives be filled with the Spirit of Jesus, who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, NKJV).⁴⁹ 🙏

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2. The present article is based on a review of all written statements by Ellen G. White that include the terms *competition* or *rivalry* or their derivatives (e.g., *compete*, *competing*, *competitor*, etc.), utilizing the online research facility (<https://egwwritings.org/>) provided by the Ellen G. White Estate (<https://whiteestate.org/>).
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4. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines *competition* as: "The act of competing, as for profit or a prize; rivalry" (<https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=competition>) and *rivalry* as "the act of competing or emulating" (ibid.: <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=rivalry>). Similarly, the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines *rivalry* as "a situation in which people, businesses, etc., compete with each other for the same thing" (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/rivalry>).
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6. _____, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 101; _____, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), 439; and _____, "The Truth and Its Power in the Heart," *Signs of the Times* (October 13, 1898).
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8. _____, *The Desire of Ages*, 435.
9. _____, Manuscript 139, 1899.
10. _____, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1890), 189. David similarly experienced "unhappy discord, rivalry and jealousy among his numerous wives and children" *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publ. Assn., 1870), 1:377.
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12. _____, Letter 26a, 1889.
13. In this context, Ellen White provided a positive reference to competition: "This glorious contest is before us. The apostle seeks to inspire us to enter into a noble emulation, a competition in which will be seen no selfishness, unfairness, or underhanded work. We are to use every spiritual nerve and muscle in the contest for the crown of life. No one who does his best will fail in this contest" (Manuscript 74, 1903).
14. In a letter to her son Edson, Ellen White wrote, "In the games in which in ancient times men strove for the ascendancy, only one received the prize. Only one hand could grasp the coveted garland. However eagerly and earnestly the other competitors had striven, they were disappointed. It is not so in the heavenly contest, the race for eternal life. Each one who does his best will receive the crown of immortality" (Letter 270, 1903).
15. Manuscript 41, 1901. On another occasion, she wrote "What alarms me most is the spirit of rivalry in our institutions" (Letter 146, 1899 to W. C. Sisley and C. H. Jones).
16. _____, Letter 262, 1907 to J. [dson] White, dated August 21. A few days later, Ellen White again wrote to Edson, "The Lord is not glorified by the work of the sanitarium that has been established in Boulder in rivalry to the original institution. The devising of this sanitarium and its working have been contrary to the will and way of the Lord" (Letter 410, 1907, dated August 26). A few weeks later, she would write to J. J. Wessels and his wife further describing the situation: "A rival sanitarium was built up in Boulder within a short distance of the original institution. One was working on right lines, the other on wrong lines. In the second institution, meat eating was indulged in, and entertainments were held that should not have been" (Letter 286, 1907, dated September 17). An earlier letter had been written to O. G. Place, a leader of the rival sanitarium, and his associates, regarding the matter, which he had disregarded (Letter 196, 1906, dated June 26).
17. Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1932), 158.
18. _____, Manuscript 2, 1902. Ellen White then added, "Because of the desire that is shown to gain advantage over one another, God will certainly humble the men bearing responsibilities in these offices of publication. . . . The converting power of God is needed to cleanse the institutions from all rivalry and pretense."
19. _____, *The Publishing Ministry* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1983), 213. Similarly, Ellen White wrote to G. A. Irwin, General Conference president, regarding the matter: "The almost endless succession of wearisome research and delay and anxiety, and the great expense in increasing facilities to multiply illustrations is simply leading in advance in a species of idolatry. Harmonious spirit and action are not brought into the work, but instead rivalry and strife" (Letter 145, 1899).
20. _____, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:173.
21. _____, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: 1903), 225.
22. _____, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1922), 182.
23. Letter 53, 1887; dated March 1 and addressed to "Brethren and Sisters Attending Oakland Meeting." A decade later, Ellen White would affirm, "When the workers combine faith and works, there will be no betrayal of sacred responsibilities and holy trusts. There will be no rivalry" (Letter 49a, 1896).
24. Ellen G. White, Manuscript 128, 1901.
25. Regarding the case of erecting a church building in Healdsburg, Ellen White wrote, "[T]here are many carpenters and others who have come from different places and settled in Healdsburg who have not been actuated by the right spirit, or the right motives. As soon as the subject of building a meetinghouse was agitated, they began to manifest a spirit of rivalry and to selfishly covet the work themselves lest someone outside of Healdsburg should be called to act a part or be made leader in the work" (Manuscript 23, 1886).
26. Manuscript 41, 1901. In discussing these business practices, Ellen White added, "Unlawful gains, petty tricks of trade, exaggeration, competition, underselling a brother who is seeking to pursue an honest business—these things are corrupting the purity of the church, and are ruinous to her spirituality" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 4:494). See also *Education*, page 137.
27. Manuscript 12, 1898. She further cautioned that if parents pursued "style and ostentation in order to gain influence in the world," this would lead their children "to compete with the show and extravagance of the world" and, as a result, to be less inclined "to save the souls for whom Christ died" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 6:450). A principle of stewardship is also involved (see *Counsels on Stewardship* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1940], page 138, and *Messages to Young People* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1930], page 312).
28. See, for example, _____, *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald 1954), page 417; and _____, *The Adventist Home* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), page 151.
29. _____, Letter 30, 1878; dated June 20 and addressed to J. [dson] White. Some 20 years later, she would again write to Edson, "I warn you not to get up a rivalry in bookmaking, for your danger was presented to me" (Letter 242, 1899).
30. _____, Letter 206, 1907 to J. E. Tenney, principal of Graysville Academy, which would later become Southern Adventist University.
31. _____, Letter 136, 1900.
32. _____, Manuscript 41, 1901.
33. _____, Manuscript 139, 1899.
34. _____, Manuscript. 41, 1901.
35. _____, Letter 105, 1904 to J. [dson] White. See also *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publ. Assn., 1877), 2:138.
36. _____, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:174.
37. Ibid., 173, 174; *Selected Messages*, 1:175.
38. _____, Manuscript 24, 1896.
39. _____, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:74. Note that Ellen White here contrasted cooperation with rivalry, on one hand, in which institutions compete with one another for supremacy, and with consolidation, on the other, where institutions fuse, losing their own identity.
40. _____, *Education*, 285.
41. _____, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:109.
42. _____, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 104.
43. _____, Letter 152, 1899.
44. _____, Manuscript 160a, 1898. In a letter to J. E. Tenney, principal of Graysville Academy in Tennessee, Ellen White similarly stated, "We must guard against the coming in of a spirit of rivalry. . . . God calls for a manifestation of unity and love" (Letter 206, 1907).
45. _____, *The Desire of Ages*, 439.
46. _____, Manuscript 131, 1899.
47. _____, *The Desire of Ages*, 439. Ellen White also wrote, "A spirit . . . to show a superiority or rivalry, is an offense to God. The Spirit of Christ will lead His followers to be concerned not only for their success and advantage, but to be equally interested for the success and advantage of their brethren" (*That I May Know Him* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1964], 176).
48. _____, Manuscript 176, 1901.
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THIS YEAR ALSO

JUSTIN KIM

What should be our reaction to the suffering of others and to news of disasters? Should we end our addiction to doomscrolling and follow Jesus to a deeper truth?

Every generation has at least one iconic breaking-news event. Some would cite the assassination of American president John F. Kennedy, while older ones would remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Yet others would mention the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communist oligarchy in Europe; and for many, the focus would be the attacks of September 11, 2001. Without any doubt, the current generation will remember the coronavirus pandemic. While the sensation of these events retains the same focus, the technological sophistication of these newsflashes and communication of breaking news tends to show an increase in intensity and fervor.

A similar news-spread seemed to have occurred in Jesus' day. Luke 13:1 to 5 records two events that were on everyone's "media feeds." First was a geo-religio-political affair where the reigning Roman government under Pilate massacred some nationalistic civilians of Galilee during their visit to the temple. One side advocated for law and order, while the other pushed for equality and justice. This could have easily been ripped from today's headlines. The second was a natural calamity when the Siloam tower fell, resulting in 18 casualties. Whether it be apartment buildings, skyscrapers, earthquakes, or tsunamis, natural and manmade disasters still leave behind disastrous results.

What do these events mean? Moreover, how would Jesus react to the news of today? With both incidents, Jesus asked whether the victims were worse sinners than the survivors. In a modern application, were the 9/11 survivors more righteous than those who died in the Twin Towers? Were people who died of COVID-19 worse sinners than the rest of us?

In short, Jesus' answer addressed the temptation to think along "pagan" lines. How many times have you been tempted to think that bad stuff happens only to bad people? The corollary to this is thinking that good things happen only to good people.

Some in the developed world have a mindset that argues that God is blessing them because of their own merit. The developing world must have sinned or have some innate fault that prevents the blessings from God. You might think yourself too sophisticated for this thinking, but how many times have you seen the reflex-like thinking that God causes suffering because of sin? Yes, there are obvious repercussions of sin and wrong decisions, but what about unconnected incidents?

This kind of thinking occurred in biblical times also. Upon the death of her son, the widow in 1 Kings 17:18 accused God of remembering her sins and punishing her for them. Such assumptions are based on pagan thinking—that the gods are angry, petty, and in need of appeasement. However, Matthew 5:45 says that God "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (NKJV).*

What then should be our reaction to the suffering of others and to news of disasters? Perhaps should we end our addiction to doom-scrolling and follow Jesus to a deeper truth? Note that Jesus transitioned from the discussion of the slain Galileans and the disaster in Siloam into a parable, and that the parable has no ending. The implication is that the readers must determine the ending. Luke 13: 6 to 9 is set in a vineyard with a fig tree in its midst. The question is: Why is there a fig tree amid grape vines?

FIG TREES AND GRAPEVINES

Fig trees were known for their productivity, since their fruit could be plucked multiple times throughout the year. The tree was a symbol of Israel, and the Bible references the two together (Joel 2:21–25; Matt. 21:18–22). Famously, Jesus cursed a fig tree that bore no fruit (Mark 11). The fig was also known as the "poor man's fruit," which had enough vitamins and nutrients to sustain one person for a whole day.

Interestingly, this farmer decides to plant a fig tree in the midst of a vineyard for a purpose. Figs and grape vineyards are often mentioned in the Bible together (Deuteronomy 8:8–10; Micah 4:4; 1 Kings 4:25; and Zechariah 3:10). While the exact agricultural relationship is unknown, the two were to have some benefit to each other, either shade for the vines, predatorial deterrent (birds going for figs instead of grapes), potential nutritional symbiosis, an aesthetic complementarity, or some mixture of these. Whatever the case, it is clear that Israel as the fig tree had a function and specific purpose to be a blessing to the vineyard of other nations. However, instead of being a blessing, the tree sucked out all the nutrients and did not provide its own fruit. Israel was receiving the blessings of God, but did not bless the nations around it, which God had intended to be its original function.

The same question could be asked of the church today—whether we have been merely receiving the blessings of God, or if we are reciprocating those

blessings to our communities, campuses, and circles. The church has a message to families, but are our marriages and families a blessing to those around us? We have hospitals, health educators, and nutritionists, but are we truly healing the vineyards we are planted in, or are they merely our patients and clients? We have schools, churches, community centers, and centers of influence, but are we in a symbiotic relationship with them for true education and God's glory, or are we merely absorbing what we want?

While fruit may not appear the first year, subsequent years should see some harvest. The mention of three years in the parable causes us to ask: How did you spend your last three years? Your last three years in school? Especially during the pandemic?

DIGGING AND DUNGING

In verses 7 to 9, the parable continues with the discouraged owner ordering the felling of the fig tree. At that moment, a gardener intercedes for one more year of mercy. Two courses of treatment are prescribed: digging and fertilizing (to “dung it,” KJV). Because of hard, impacted soil, nutrients and water at times cannot penetrate the ground to reach the roots. So skilled digging is necessary to break apart the soil, allowing for seepage while not damaging the root structure.

I had the opportunity to visit some of my relatives in the rural countryside of South Korea away from electricity, roads, or stores. I watched them make use of every resource they had. Being raised in the United States, I was used to my creature comforts, namely a toilet. The only available outhouse was outfitted with a bottom compartment that could be removed to extract the dung. Those communities living away from civilization have to make use of *everything!* Mixed with other chemicals and fertilizers, the dunging process was quite disgusting, odorous, and loathsome. But under skillful hands, fertilization revived dying plants and withering crops, regardless of condition. As appalled as I was by the process, I was still amazed at their expertise.


How does God deal with a people that refuse to look beyond the satisfaction of their own needs? Rather than immediate judgment, an Intercessor pleads for extra time to produce fruit, or symbolically, souls for the kingdom (John 15:16) and the character of Jesus (Galatians 5:22). Under the hands of the Master Gardener, a regimen of experiences is permitted, digging through our stone-hard hearts and dunging with foul and fragrant grace—the exact components needed for growth.

Singer-songwriter Laura Story's 2012 Grammy Award winning song, *Blessings*, contains lyrics that illustrate the response we need to trials and tribulations in our

lives. When her husband was diagnosed with a brain tumor, she prayed for “blessings,” but was met with seeming silence. She later realized that the experience she went through was the blessing itself whereby she received peace, healing, and a greater desire for spiritual things. Digging and dunging indeed!

GRACE TO ENDURE

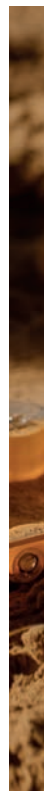
God does not always remove suffering but rather grants us the grace and strength to endure *through* suffering. He gives us the patience, endurance, and character *through* the pain. Under the hands of a Master Gardener, our hearts are made more verdant through His digging and more resilient through His dunging. He imbues us with the nutrients and resources for true spiritual-life growth. This is grace. This is mercy. For this year also.

The shock of the headline is not meant to show us how petty God is. Rather, Jesus says twice, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). In other words, Jesus sought for His hearers—and us—to be shocked into reflection and repentance; woken from self-centered drunken slumber, only to ponder their and our true purpose here on this earth. Are we producing fruit, souls, and character for the kingdom? As Luke 13:9 states, “‘if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’” Any other purpose is a waste of time and will result in our being just another statistic for the news. How will you answer this open-ended question? Will you allow Christ to dig and dung for “‘this year also’”? 

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FINDING HIS WAY



EMILIA BELIA

Soon I found out that God not only fulfilled the desires of my heart, but also surpassed them. Of course, I must give myself entirely to Him and trust His wisdom and purpose for my life.

At some point in childhood, we all think we are very clear about what our profession will be once we become adults. However, during our teenage years, most of us are no longer as confident as when we were children, especially when we reach the end of high school and must choose a university based on the profession we would like to pursue. At this crossroads, we tend to make decisions based on a combination of factors such as the talents God has given us, opinions and advice from trusted people, what we like to do, where we can afford to go, and what we know (or think we know). In the list, you will notice the “talent” component, and here I have to admit that it was challenging for me to identify my talents. Sometimes I doubted I had any!

The Word of God affirms that “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10, NIV).*

Accordingly, when making a decision as important as my professional career, I wanted to ensure that my profession combined my desire to serve God through my service to others and what I enjoyed doing. I did not ask for much, or did I? Honestly, this uncertainty accompanied me during the earlier years of my undergraduate studies as I was pursuing a degree in biological sciences.

Being a Christian student in an environment dominated by a philosophy that was different from and antagonistic toward my beliefs about origins was an interesting and challenging experience. I found myself lacking knowledge of both naturalism and creationism. The desire to learn and understand more about these topics was one of the driving forces during my college years.

I remember that it all started on a day when I was studying for one of my bachelor's exams in biology. I was reading about the theory of the evolution of chordates. From the point of view of the analogy and genetics, it all made sense and seemed coherent; however, many unanswered questions kept popping up in my mind. My beliefs, convictions, and worldview collided with the ideas and theories in the textbook. It was at that moment, sitting at my desk, that I closed my eyes and spoke to God, asking for help, discernment, and answers. I was frustrated and mistakenly believed that I was wasting my time. Despite my questions and lack of understanding, I was certain of the reality of a Creator God. At that moment, in front of my books, I remember feeling the desire to understand more about this apparent conflict. It was then that I clung to the promise made by our Lord: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7, NIV).

RESOURCES ON SCIENCE AND FAITH

After my prayer, I started looking for resources on science and faith topics on the Internet. In my search, I found a website where teachers and professionals from Adventist educational institutions were invited to participate in a Congress of Science and Faith organized by the River Plate Adventist University (UAP is its acronym in Spanish) in Argentina and the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) in California, U.S.A. I was not yet a teacher, nor was I a professional, but I couldn't stop thinking about that advertisement. I had a deep desire to be able to attend this conference. I sent an email to the conference's education director explaining my situation and expressing my desire to attend that meeting. To my surprise, he responded favorably to my request and confirmed that I would be included in the attendees' list.



Coincidentally, that same year I had to decide the major I would follow in my undergraduate degree. I had four options: botany, vertebrates, genetics, and paleontology. I was not sure which I should choose; however, the only thing I was sure of was that the major in paleontology was not an option for me. Nevertheless, a short time later, God would show me that I was wrong.

I cannot express how excited I was that day when I set out on the trip to UAP to attend the congress. To my surprise, most of the talks were related to geology and paleontology. Each of these topics was fascinating to me. These Christian geologists and paleontologists had questions similar to mine! In their presentations, they emphasized the difference between data and interpretation. I thought that I was going to solve some of my conflicting questions; instead, I learned that we will not always have answers to all our questions in science.

THE TAPHONOMY OF WHALES

One of the presentations that caught my attention dealt with studies based on the taphonomy of whales preserved in the Pisco Formation in Peru. After that presentation, I approached the speaker to request more information about the investigations being carried out in that area, to which he graciously agreed.

...when I reflect on the plans I had for my life and how those plans were switched by the plans God proposed to me, I can't help but think how often I have made God laugh with my projects.

A week later, I formalized my request by e-mail, and within a few days, I received copies of his papers and a lot of information related to the work of these scientists. Until then, the only publication directed at Christian university students that I received on a sporadic basis was *Dialogue*.

Frequently, when I reflect on the plans I had for my life and how those plans were switched by the plans God proposed to me, I can't help but think how often I have made God laugh with my projects. Undoubtedly, many times. My participation in that congress was a turning point in my life. To learn that there were believing scientists in my church, whom the church also supported to conduct research and publish their work, was an unexpected and pleasant revelation to me. I thanked God for His answer! For I intimately understood that paleontology was precisely the orientation God had in mind for my professional future. That year I decided to finish my degree with an emphasis in paleontology. After I decided on that option, everything flowed faster and more naturally in my student and professional life.

As a result of my interest in the GRI research in the Pisco Formation, I participated in two fieldwork with GRI researchers. This allowed me to complete my bachelor's thesis and pass it successfully. These experiences were enriching to me as a researcher and enabled me to continue my graduate studies at Loma Linda University (LLU).

At the beginning of my doctoral program in Earth Sciences at Loma Linda University, I already knew that I wanted to study calcareous nannofossils (coccoliths) in the Pisco Basin, even though their existence in that basin (predominantly siliciclastic) was scarcely documented in the scientific literature. However, by the grace of God and after arduous fieldwork with the help of my research advisor and field assistants, I managed to find the sediment where the calcareous nannofossils of the Pisco Basin were preserved.

The following year I had the joy and privilege of attending my first international meeting of scientists specializing in nannofossils, representing the Department of Earth Sciences at LLU, which was held in Bohol, Philippines. In that event, I presented my preliminary research, which was awarded as best student poster presentation among dozens of other students' presentations from many different countries. I felt that this recognition was a caress from Him, blessing my research project. But the joys and surprises did not end in the awarding of my presentation. It also gave me the opportunity to make new friends at that scientific meeting and to consolidate my career as a researcher. Later, I published my research with my advisor and two scientists I met during this and another event.

Like me in my college years, some of you will likely find yourselves overwhelmed by doubts, unanswered questions, and internal conflicts about how to walk through in the academic environment as a Christian student. I can tell you without a doubt that you are not alone. God is by your side and willing to guide you during your journey. He not only fulfilled the desires of my heart; but also surpassed them. Of course, you must give yourself entirely to Him and trust His wisdom and purpose for your life. You must also be willing to step out of your comfort zone and not be afraid of taking risks or failing. Everything I told you up to now was neither easy nor simple. It requires work, perseverance, commitment . . . but above all, trust in God's promises and desires for your life. I encourage you to try it. I guarantee it; it is worth it. 🙏

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Gettyimage

WHEN GOD SPEAKS

The Bible declares that God often spoke to His people through the prophets, through His Word, and through wonders and signs—and above all through His Son, Jesus Christ. The messages of the prophets became signposts and markers for predicting the coming of the Messiah and deliverance of God's people from their oppression. Although God repeatedly promised a Savior, Israel got lost in their wait and search, and even the elite and the educated missed the Messiah.

Missing the Messiah and the Savior, and landing in the search for a miracle worker has become a tragedy in human history. In Jesus' day, the inhabitants of Cana faced a similar challenge.

THE HUMAN CONDITION

Cana is where Jesus performed His first miracle (John 2:1–11). The news that Jesus had turned water into wine spread quickly and brought attention to His ministry. This marvelous sign, however, did not produce a lasting faith among the people of Cana. John (4:46–54) records Jesus passing through this region again and people waiting for Him not as a Savior but as a magician or a sign worker. The people were excited to have this miracleworker back in town. What would we expect of Jesus today if He were passing through our neighborhood?

ANDREW BEN JACOB

God has spoken to
His people through
the prophets, through
His Word, and
through wonders and
signs, and above all
through His Son.

Another illustration: Among those who saw Jesus going through Nazareth was a nobleman from Capernaum, whose son was sick unto death. When Jesus looked over the crowd, He did not see individuals hungry for the truth, but instead people who wanted another sign, another miracle. But while the crowd was seeking for a sign, this man sought to convince Jesus to come to his house. To the crowd that surrounded Him, Jesus said, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe” (John 4:48, NKJV).¹

Jesus was speaking about their spiritual condition—a preoccupation with finding proof for belief rather than exercising trust and faith. Sin has caused us to build towering egos and smaller altars of worship; it has made us crave for the tangible and renounce the spiritual. Many of the people of Cana were sign-seekers, rather than Savior-seekers!

Let me put it another way: How many signs does one have to see in his or her lifetime to finally believe? Although the Bible constitutes God’s revelation of events through signs and wonders, it does not stop there. He showed the children of Israel numerous signs (Deuteronomy 4:34). Gideon asked the Lord for a sign before the battle, which He provided (Judges 6:36–40). The apostles performed signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:43; 5:12–16; 15:12). The question that we need to ask ourselves is whether our faith is dependent on signs and wonders, or does it grow in the absence of miracles and amazement?

Often enough we are caught in situations like those described above, and we too look for signs and miracles in decision making. We often seem to say, Lord, give me a sign if this profession will help me grow or this relationship will bring me honor. I do believe God speaks to us through various means to get our attention. He speaks in many more ways, and somewhat clearer ways as well—through the Scriptures, godly leaders and acquaintances, and religious books, as well as through the “still small voice” of conscience and a variety of other means like dreams.

GOD’S CALL FOR FAITH

One of the major problems of Christianity is that believers try to put God in a box. We have learned of His ways in the past and begin to predict His next move based on His prior revelation. The words of Isaiah speak of a God who is creative and limitless: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways

Sin has caused us to build towering egos and smaller altars of worship; it has made us crave for the tangible and renounce the spiritual.

higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

The Bible speaks a great deal of what God is like: He is loving (1 John 4:8), slow to anger and abounding in mercy (Psalm 103:8), just in His ways (Isaiah 30:18), righteous and upright (Deuteronomy 32:4). But when it comes to knowing His ways, we cannot—and must not—try to limit or predict how God will accomplish His purposes. Although through the gift of prophecy God has pulled back the curtain and shown the prophets the end of time, the details of the fulfillment of these prophecies remain unknown to the human mind. The weakness of our human condition means that we want God to be as we perceive Him in our minds. But He often does remarkable and unexpected things. God brought water not out of a cloud, but a rock (Exodus 17:6), He caused a donkey to speak to Balaam (Numbers 22:20–39), and most of Jesus’ followers were not from the high-class Pharisees (although there were some) but rather common people like fishermen, tax collectors, social outcasts, and people who had infirmities or were demon possessed (Matthew 4:18–24; 9:9; 2; Mark 12:37; 16:9; Luke 17:11–19).

The nobleman who was pleading with Jesus to heal his son had one goal: to bring the Master to his home. Ellen White adds color to this story by stating that the son was severely sick and that there was a high chance that he would die while the father was away.² The nobleman had a choice: to stay home and spend the last moments with his dying son, or go in faith to Jesus. He had no assurance that he would meet Jesus. The narrative implies that the nobleman thought Jesus had to be at the bedside of the boy to ensure that the miracle took place. But instead, Jesus performed a long-distance miracle.

The people during the time of Jesus were healed in unique and diverse ways. For a blind man, He mixed spittle with dirt to form a paste and placed it on the man’s eyes (John 9:1–12); for a leper, He cured him and later instructed him to offer the ritual prescribed by the Deuteronomic code (Mark 1:40–45); He

asked the paralytic man at the pool at Bethesda to get up, take up his bed, and walk (John 5:5–9), and the woman with the issue of blood was healed because she reached out in faith and touched the edge of His robe (Luke 8:43–48).

While we may attempt to put God in a box, Jesus did something altogether different: He answered the nobleman: “Go your way, your son lives.” No flashy pronouncement, no outward sign, no rhetorical statement, just a simple instruction—to go home. In faith the nobleman had traveled from Capernaum to Cana, in faith he returned home. Midway he met his servants, who greeted him with the news of his son’s recovery, and on inquiry about the time of his healing, the servants responded that it was at the seventh hour, the very same moment Jesus pronounced those simple words. Faith found its victory.

GOD’S WARNINGS ABOUT DECEPTIONS

The Bible writers have a common theme: the relentless pursuit of God to save humankind and to be aware of the deceptions that lurk on our path. During His ministry, Jesus warned people about those who come as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15). The prophet Jeremiah warned about people who speak from their own mind, and have visions from their own hearts (Jeremiah 23:16); Paul and several other Bible writers also admonished the church to be aware of false prophets (2 Timothy 4:3, 4; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1). The enemy is skilled in replicating and performing multiple signs for deception (Exodus 7:11–23; Revelation 13:13, 14). The point where the rubber meets the road in our spiritual walk with God is when we ask: Am I seeking a sign or the Savior? Signs and wonders excite us, but do not always convict us. We as believers should not seek for signs and wonders as the basis of our faith, but rather expressions of the good news, revelation, or a warning of the future.

Although God speaks to us through signs and wonders, it is only through faith that we respond to God.

We serve a God who is moved by sincere acts of faith rather than pompous shows of human glory. A humble prayer, a selfless act, and a pure heart reaching to Him in faith are what pleases God. Jesus Himself said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). We have not seen the glory of Christ’s transfiguration like Peter, or touched His wounds like Thomas, but through faith we believe that through Jesus we are saved. Mountains will move, prayers will be answered, miracles will happen when we keep faith as our anchor.

Faith is contagious: When the nobleman reached home, his whole household believed (John 4:53). Some of us may get the commandments and ordinances right, but without faith, our cart is still half empty. Are you trying to please God? If so, remember these words, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). 🙏

Andrew Ben Jacob

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif. : Pacific Press, 1947), 197.

PUBLIC CAMPUS MINISTRIES IN CONCEPCIÓN

MISSION DURING PANDEMIC TIME IN CHILE

SÓCRATES QUISPE-CONDORI

The University of Concepción (UdeC) is one of the renowned centers of higher education in Chile, where hundreds of Adventists study to complete their professional training. Some of those students face challenges while living their faith in accordance with biblical principles. These challenges would be more complicated were it not for mission-minded students and professors who create social, emotional, and spiritual support spaces.

When Benjamín Guerra arrived at UdeC in 2016 to study history and geography, he was looking for a place where he could get a good education and at the same time maintain his spiritual growth and strength. He was happy to find “Adventus UdeC,” established by a small group of Adventist university students in 2008. The group’s focus was to provide an opportunity for students to share their conflicts and struggles, but mainly, to talk about Jesus.

As time went by, the group gained participants from other universities in the region. By 2018, UdeC’s Public Campus Ministry (PCM) had six new PCM groups. Thus, “PCM Concepción” was established, composed of University of Concepción, Catholic University of the Most Holy Conception, University of Santo Tomas,

University for Development, University of Bío Bío, Andrés Bello National University, and San Sebastián University.

But then came the pandemic, which necessitated changes in the strategies of PCM, including the addition of a one-hour virtual meeting, once a week. But the difficulties did not diminish the groups’ passion for mission and discipleship. With respect to mission, they participated as volunteers in the Roberto Paz project, which assists indigent people. PCM was responsible to organize spiritual programs, to help in the reintegration of these people back into society.

Photo courtesy of Sócrates Quispe Condori



PCM Concepción virtual meeting to strengthen discipleship as part of the “Ambassadors Program.”

For discipleship, they implemented the Ambassadors Program in order to transfer knowledge, leadership, and mission to young Adventist university students who were starting their careers.

However, the primary purpose of the organization was not limited to caring for Adventist university students. Every participant was challenged to evangelize non-Adventist students. Offering appropriate and spiritual meetings to those who would never enter a church due to their prejudices, PCM became an evangelizing arm of the church inside each university. Following Christ’s person-to-person approach, UdeC’s PCMs baptized and disciplined new members. One student, Valeria León, newly baptized on October 9, 2021, says: “I thank God for giving me the opportunity to join PCM. It is very special to find such happy young people who have great patience and who helped me to know Jesus in a new way.”

Jesus tells us “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, NKJV).* As we are slowly returning to in-person meetings, PCM continues fulfilling its mission, inviting us all to share Jesus wherever we are, to become the light to others at the universities where we study. 🏛️

Photo courtesy of Sócrates Quispe Condori



Valeria León’s baptism—October 9, 2021.

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Sócrates Quispe-Condori

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General Conference Session 2022
Virtual Exhibition Experience



SARA BENAVIDES

A dialogue with an
Adventist architect
from El Salvador



INTERVIEW BY ISAAC A. MENÉNDEZ PÉREZ

Sara Benavides, born in El Salvador as a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist, grew up to become an architect. She is currently construction project manager of Excel Automotriz, which belongs to the Poma Group, one of the country's largest businesses and industrial consortiums, with several branches and more than 100 years of service. Benavides also provides consulting services for the blueprint designs of Bom Bom Baked and Pastry Products, and works in designing selling-point and storage facilities for DUISA United Industrial Distribution in San Salvador.

Sara Benavides is the youngest of seven children. Her contributions to society through her country-wide work are well known and acknowledged.

Her passion to serve others is governed solely by God's call to care for the poor, the needy, and the deprived in society.

Throughout her life, Benavides has excelled not only in professional commitment and developmental contribution, but also in ensuring that the poorer sections of society find hope and meaning in their struggles. As part of her long-time commitment toward this objective, she has instilled and developed in her only daughter, Sara Raquel Rivas, both a desire and spiritual commitment to care for the poor and to serve the needy. To fulfill such a social goal, Benavides motivated her daughter to go for medical training. And Raquel, for her part, has already involved herself in caring for the poor and needy even as she pursues her medical studies.

■ *What are your current personal and professional interests?*

My daughter, Sara Raquel Rivas, comes first. She is presently studying medicine, and she is the joy of my life. She fears God and loves serving others. As regards my job, presently I am designing and overseeing the construction of car-repair shops and sales halls for Excel Automotriz, one of the largest car-distribution companies in El Salvador. In addition, I also provide private consulting services, and right now am working on the remodeling of industrial facilities of one of the largest pastry companies in the region. When it comes to religious commitment, I am deeply involved in remodeling projects of Seventh-day Adventist churches to make them more inclusive, with better access to those with disabilities.

■ *Take us through your training and professional experience.*

I finished my architecture studies at the Polytechnic University of El Salvador. I also have two Master's degrees: one in environmental studies (José Simeón Cañas Central American University) and one in teaching (Teaching University of El Salvador).

With regard to my professional experience, I was the founder of the National Popular Housing Fund (FONAVIPO). I have also worked for the USAID agency, with FOMILENIO, and for the Ministry of Education.

■ *Why did you choose to study architecture?*

Since I was a young child, I have enjoyed design and creating, making things. I decided to study architecture when I was 8 years old. Thank God, I was able to fulfill my dream of becoming an architect, and as a result, have helped build thousands of houses for people of limited means.

■ *Were you born into a Seventh-day Adventist family?*

Yes, I am a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist. My father was an Adventist pioneer in eastern El Salvador. Together, my parents were engaged in gospel social work in our neighborhood: My mother would prepare as many food bags as possible, and then my father would distribute them to the needy. This social outreach provided opportunities for my father and his friends at the church to share the gospel.

My mother was a pioneer in prison ministries. For 30 years, she served in the largest jail in El Salvador.

■ *How did you become convicted about the Adventist faith?*

My father used to work for the 14 richest families in El Salvador, which helped us to have a comfortable



Architect Benavides accompanied by construction workers. Photo provided by Sara Benavides.

upbringing. Those economic privileges tempted me to enjoy a lifestyle that was far from God. My dream was to purchase a home in a classy neighborhood and for my daughter to attend the best schools in the country. It was a key moment, when I ended up reflecting on the consequences my influence would have on my daughter's spirituality. God helped me to change those plans. So, I chose a regular middle-class neighborhood, and sent my daughter to an Adventist school. Now I serve God willingly and joyfully. I try to get closer to Him every single day.

■ *Could you share a challenging situation you encountered, and how you managed to address it?*

When I worked for FONAVIPO, something extraordinary happened to me. I worked for most government offices from Monday to Friday. One day, I got a letter saying that soon, we would start working on Saturdays as well. I was worried about Sabbath observance, but I placed everything in God's hands, and relied on His promises. Soon He answered. Even before the new plan could be implemented, the Saturday study and work plan was dropped.

■ *What are some projects in which you are currently involved? What are the joys and challenges of these projects?*

At present, I am working in the construction of a mega-complex and the overseeing of school centers for the Department of Education. At the Scandia Adventist church, I am also in charge of the Dorcas ministry. I also support Adventist Possibility Ministries for the El Salvador Union Mission, and regularly provide food for children with cancer and for their parents at the Adventist residence of the Miramonte church.



Architect Benavides and her daughter overseeing construction.

Every Sabbath morning, we provide our church elders with a nutritious breakfast and, once a month, we provide lunch. Seeing them happy as they chat together and knowing that they are well cared for fill me with satisfaction. At the Adventist residence, we offer food and a place to stay for families of children at the Benjamin Bloom Hospital in San Salvador. I assist them once or twice a month, providing them with food for a whole day. Families staying there are usually very poor, and they often come from other countries or faraway places and lack funds to pay for lodging.

■ *Which areas of service have given you the greatest satisfaction in your job? And which are the biggest challenges?*

My greatest satisfaction is found in being in touch with people and being able to help them improve their lives because of what I do. My biggest challenge is finding means to provide regular and reliable service of high quality to families in need. In my local church, the biggest challenge is to create an awareness about the need for its infrastructure to be suitable for people with disabilities, offering them better access to our church and school facilities.

■ *How do you integrate your faith and your job?*

My faith guides the honesty and truthfulness in how I do my job, and how I relate to my fellow workers and supervisors. Dishonesty or unfaithfulness, however small or insignificant it may be, reflects on the genuineness of one's faith. I am cautious to

make sure that the faith that I profess is also the one that guides the conduct of my life and relationships. As an example, I want to make sure always that the privilege of keeping the Sabbath reflects in all truthfulness in my faith and in my work.

■ *How do you manage to balance your family and professional life?*

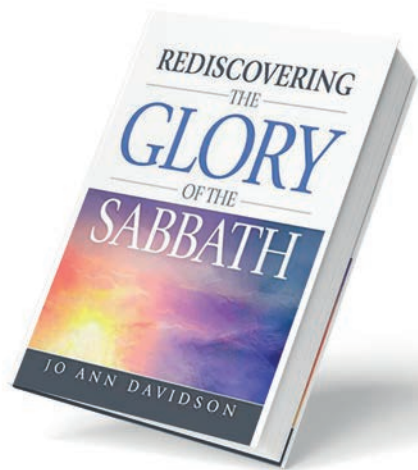
I try to manage my time well. Every day, I wake up at 4:30 a.m. I cook and organize for the day. I adapt my working hours to my daughter's study hours, so I can fulfill my work duties. Sabbath is an exclusive day for family and for doing God's work. On Sunday, we do physical exercise and outdoor activities. We also plan the activities for the week.

■ *If one of our readers would like to follow in the same line of work, what advice would you give?*

Be faithful to God. Trust God. He is always faithful to what He has promised and has never forsaken His children, even in the most challenging moments. Even when you are finding it hard to keep the Sabbath, keep being faithful, because God will reward your faithfulness. ☮

Isaac A. Menéndez Pérez

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REDISCOVERING THE GLORY OF THE SABBATH

Jo Ann Davidson (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2021); paperback and Kindle, 224 pages.

Reviewed by Paluku Mwendambio

The central theme of Jo Ann Davidson’s book is found in the title of the book itself: *Rediscovering the Glory of the Sabbath*. While dealing with several issues related to the Sabbath, including salvation experience, Davidson presents an impressive survey of the Bible and church history that indicates that throughout history, the biblical Sabbath has always been taught, kept, distorted, and restored. It never disappeared. It remains as ever a divine blessed gift to humans. Did not Jesus declare, “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27, NKJV)*?

In addition to an introduction, the book is divided into seven chapters. The introduction shows that the Sabbath is a relevant major biblical teaching with a twofold emphasis: first, its focus is on Jesus, the “Lord . . . of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8); second, its insistence that the Sabbath was never intended to be a burden but rather a delight.

The author takes the first two chapters to offer a compressed study of the Sabbath to indicate how the subject extensively permeates the Old Testament. In Chapter 1, the author deals with the Sabbath as God’s gift to Adam and Eve at the creation of the world—before they sinned or had even worked. They did not keep the Sabbath to be saved. Hence, no one is required to keep the Sabbath to receive grace. God set apart the seventh day of the week for fellowship between Him and humans. Its observance aims to nurture people in God’s goodness, holiness, joy,

and the privilege to worship Him as a result of knowing Him. Chapter 2 deals with the history of the Sabbath—its perversion and restoration from post-Moses to the time of Malachi. This section emphasizes the fact that the Sabbath is a reminder that God the Creator exists, and that He loves and sustains what He created. The observance of the Sabbath thus should inspire a sense of responsibility and loving care, producing a community that delights in the Lord and His day of worship.

Chapters 3 to 6 continue the survey of the Sabbath in history and recount how it never lost its significance through the intertestamental period to our times. This section also investigates how Jewish leaders during the intertestamental era created rules and regulations for protecting and correct observance of the Sabbath in every situation. Such schema often introduced the concept that Sabbath keeping is essential to salvation experience. Indeed, Sabbath keeping grew into a complex spiritual and moral yoke that made God the Lawgiver a tyrant, and obedience to His law became a matter of external conformity that minimized one’s heart relationship with God. Such a turning of the Sabbath from God-given priority of holy living to a human yoke ruined the glory of the Sabbath. In His time, Jesus rejected this attitude. He strove to restore the Sabbath in its true glory by demonstrating that it was a day of healing and restoration. His followers continue to bear witness to this revolutionary initiative.

The concluding chapter reiterates that the Sabbath, just like salvation, is a gift of divine grace; its observance is more than fulfilling a commandment; it is a perpetual reminder of our origin with and our dependency on God. Sabbath is God’s gift to foster human relationship with God and to help grow humans in His likeness.

The author should be commended for placing before the Christian world the sacredness and eternal relevance of the Sabbath at a time when negative attitudes toward the sacredness of the Sabbath seem to minimize the importance of God’s commandment to “keep it” (Deuteronomy 5:12). As the book concludes, the seventh day of the week should be considered as the “birthday of the world” during which we can happily celebrate and “wish each other *Happy Birthday!*” (p. 223). 🙏

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PIONEER MEDICAL MISSIONARIES TO CHINA

THE UNTOLD STORY OF BERTHA AND ARTHUR SELMON

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL



Dr. Arthur C. Selmon and Dr. Bertha E. Selmon with their adopted Chinese children.

Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists

Editor's note: "Footprints of Faith" features inspiring stories based on original research published in the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (ESDA) [<https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/>] about people who responded with courage to Christ's call to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19, NIV).¹

The Selmons graduated from the first Seventh-day Adventist medical school, the American Medical Missionary College, which eventually merged with the University of Illinois College of Medicine. On March 10, 2021, the Adventist School of Medicine of East-Central Africa opened at the Adventist University of Central Africa in Rwanda as the denomination's newest medical school. Other Adventist medical schools are at Loma Linda University (formerly College of Medical Evangelists), U.S.A.; Montemorelos University, Mexico; River Plate University, Argentina; Babcock University, Nigeria; Peruvian Union University, Peru; and Adventist University of the Philippines, Philippines.

Bertha Eugenia Loveland was born on December 15, 1877, in Ohio, U.S.A. Her mother converted to Adventism about 1884. In the fall of 1886, Bertha was baptized at the Ohio camp meeting. The death of a neighbor's child, whom she tried to help, prompted her to study medicine. She raised her initial US\$30 canvassing, and then went on to study at Battle Creek College (Michigan, U.S.A.), graduating in 1898.

Arthur Clifford Selmon was born on December 26, 1877, in Iowa, U.S.A. Arthur grew up in a Methodist home and attended Mount Pleasant Academy in Iowa. He graduated from Howe's Academy with honors in 1896. He dated his conversion to the spring of 1897 from reading Adventist literature. He then went on to spend two years at Keokuk Medical College.

Arthur and Bertha both matriculated into Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's American Medical Missionary College from which they both graduated with degrees in medicine in 1902. The next year, Arthur taught anatomy and physiology at the University of Illinois. The couple married on July 6, 1903, in a ceremony at Battle Creek, Michigan, officiated by church leaders W. W. Prescott and A. G. Daniells. Arthur would also be ordained as a minister soon after he arrived in China.

MISSIONARY BEGINNINGS (1903–1904)

On October 5, 1903, Arthur and Bertha left on the *Empress of India* from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, with two other graduates of the American Medical Missionary College, Harry and Maude Miller. After a brief stopover in Japan, they arrived in Shanghai,² where they gathered supplies and then went up the Yangtze River into the interior as far as they could, after which they spent four days "traveling on wheelbarrows and donkey carts." The group was part of a third wave of Adventist missionary reinforcements, first with Abram La Rue as a self-supporting missionary in 1888, then with J. N. and Emma Anderson, who with Ida Thompson went as reinforcements in 1902 to Hong Kong, and then in the following year the Selmons and the Millers. Another missionary couple, Eric and Ida Pilquist, had embraced Adventism and had begun initial efforts to establish an Adventist missionary presence in mainland China. This "third wave" of missionaries was in response to a call for help in establishing the first permanent Adventist mission station in central China.

Upon their arrival the young physicians were inundated with sick patients. One such patient was miraculously healed. Arthur complained about the adoption of foreign vices, such as cigarettes, that made missionary work even more challenging. Bertha was particularly concerned about infanticide and infant deaths in general. Whatever the cause, she estimated that six out of

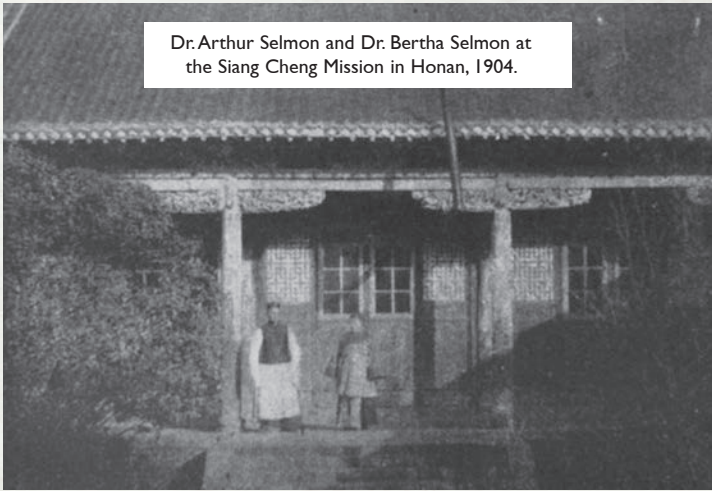
ten babies in the interior of China died before the age of three. Soon the Selmons moved half a mile away into their "own little compound." The new place had two homes with mud-brick construction and dirt floors. They wished for wooden floorboards, but wood was very expensive; so they managed to become "settled" in their new home feeling "happy and contented." In addition to treating the sick, they worked diligently to learn the language from a recent native convert.

Early on, Bertha felt a passion for reaching out to women. Their first convert from the higher classes was won, despite bitter opposition, when Bertha asked her to help her understand the language. The woman, Mrs. Liu, was curious about the medical work they did. Later Mrs. Liu asked Bertha if she would like to do something for the girls and young women in the city to help them learn to read. This led to the opening of a school, the very first Adventist school in central China after the one begun just slightly earlier by Ida Thompson in Canton. Ida Pilquist had trained one woman as a Bible worker, and they hoped to soon start a Bible school for these women.

The Selmons wrote that their initial plans had "greatly changed since coming here," such as following the example of Eric Pilquist to do itinerant medical and evangelistic work. Based upon their missionary experience, they concluded that the converted Chinese was the "most effective worker" to reach his or her own people. They continued to learn about the customs and the "great religions of China—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—yet ancestral worship is a feature common to all." In each home was an ancestral tablet from which mothers trained children at a young age "to worship their ancestors." As a result, Arthur noticed the "great need of women as missionaries here in China. The lady missionary can go with her Bible into the home and present the gospel to the mother, and in this way strike at the very root of this false religion."

The Selmons soon experienced some "bitter" opposition against their missionary efforts. As Bertha later remembered: "There is no romance in going out into the field. There are obstacles to meet, difficulties to overcome." One way to overcome these obstacles was through medical treatments that helped "prepare hearts to hear and receive the gospel." The unhygienic conditions and lack of medical care meant the "life span was shortened so much in China that the average length of life was probably only about thirty years."

They also continued their plans to quickly establish a school to train "both native and foreign workers." Thus, early on, these Adventist missionaries embraced a three-fold missionary strategy of training local people to do evangelism, establishing a printing press to disseminate materials in the local language, and operating a health clinic with which to minister to the sick. "The people



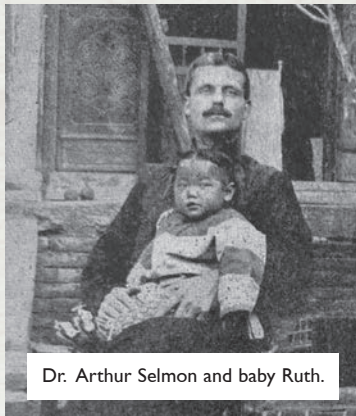
Dr. Arthur Selmon and Dr. Bertha Selmon at the Siang Cheng Mission in Honan, 1904.



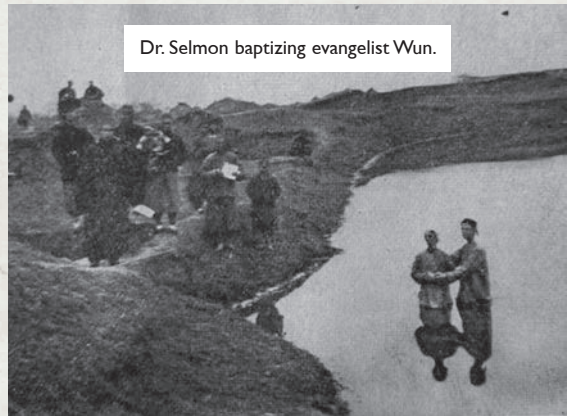
Dr. Bertha Selmon's girls' school, 1905.



Dr. Bertha Selmon and baby Ruth.



Dr. Arthur Selmon and baby Ruth.



Dr. Selmon baptizing evangelist Wun.

From Adventism in China Digital Image Repository / All photos taken from *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.

of this province,” wrote Arthur, “who have heard of the Sabbath and the other truths of the third angel’s message call it the ‘true doctrine.’”

At times their work could be dangerous. On one trip, Arthur and Harry Miller were attacked by bandits. Arthur received bruises on his shoulders and a hand cut. Despite this, he wrote, “In order to work successfully, the missionary must come in close touch with the people and be one among them; and to do this, he must be well acquainted with the language and the life of those among whom he is working.” While in this part of China, the Selmons adopted a Chinese girl whom they would raise as their own, Ruth, who lived from 1905 to 1945. Later they would also adopt a boy, Paul Lyle (1907-1929).

MISSIONARY EXPANSION (1904–1909)

In 1904, the group of missionaries felt sufficiently comfortable with the language to expand in different directions about a day’s journey apart. Early on, Bertha emphasized the need to reach the women in this new location. She

hired a woman to do her sewing, and when she became sick, she treated her at her home. Her new friend invited her to teach a group of women how to sing hymns. As she explained the words, Bertha found this to be an easy way to share her beliefs. She noted the harsh conditions under which these women worked to support their families. Over time, Bertha expanded her work for women and children. “Chinese customs in dispensary work,” she noted, “as well as in most other matters, required that men and women groups should be separate. Even in the chapels a partition divided the room into two parts, so that the women sat on one side and the men on the other.”

The Selmons continued to work in culturally sensitive ways to interest people in the Adventist message. For example, recognizing the great value placed upon written characters, the Selmons wrapped medicine in a tract. This was apparently quite effective for some who would not ordinarily listen to them openly share their beliefs. Arthur also developed a primer for school use. Arthur was especially concerned that future missionar-

ies “live close to the people.” They should regard “their native helpers as brethren and fellow workers” and avoid “anything that would lead to any feeling of caste springing up.” They should avoid all outward display and adopt “the dress of the people.”

The Selmons wrote regularly for church publications urging young people to consider a missionary vocation. In 1906 there was a resurgence of another nativist uprising (a so-called return of the earlier “Boxer Uprising”) from which many missionaries fled. At that time, Arthur was away in Hankow; so he hurried back, and they stayed quietly at their mission post trusting that the Lord would “let us know when [we needed] to leave.”

This unrest unfortunately interfered with Bertha’s attempts to operate a girls’ school because after this trouble, many girls were afraid to be associated with foreigners. Instead, they used the time to raise funds and send copies of Adventist publications to the estimated 290 Christian mission stations across China. This led to P. J. Laird, an Anglican missionary, to convert to Adventism. The Selmons also spent about a month translating and preparing an Adventist hymnal in Chinese. Within a short time, Bertha had her girls’ school back and running again. She also began to train a local woman, whom she had taught to read and write, to assist with the school.

In early 1907 two significant turning points emerged. First, Arthur baptized his first convert, a young man he called “Evangelist” Wun, on January 12, who had spent the previous two years helping him with evangelistic meetings. A second major turning point was the organization of the Adventist missionary work in China at a “Shanghai Council” held February 10–20, 1907. At this gathering, the early missionaries, with new recruits, gathered from various mission stations (many of whom had never met fellow missionaries due to the significant distance between mission stations). They organized several committees, of which Arthur served on the publishing committee, and Bertha served on committees that sought to develop a “uniform hymn book” for the whole field and to promote the Sabbath school work.

At that time malaria and cholera were major challenges. Dr. Harry Miller noted that he would see the Selmons about once every three months, and that all the missionaries seemed to take turns getting malaria or cholera. From December 8 to 14, 1907, the Selmons hosted the first-ever Chinese Bible-training institute for a week with 50 interested believers from surrounding missions who came for Bible instruction. The Selmons’ mission station at Siang Cheng was the most centrally located and provided a “commodious and convenient” place for them to host the meeting. At the close of the event, Arthur baptized seven people. They held the first documented communion service by Adventist missionaries in China and organized a church at Siang Cheng. A second “general meeting” was held start-

ing on October 24, 1908, which lasted for nine days. These training sessions set a pattern whereby these early missionaries invested in the local people, training and equipping them to reach others.

Bertha’s poor health (“a grave tropical malady”—possibly a bad attack of malaria) necessitated their seeking refuge from the heat. The General Conference granted them sick leave in conjunction with their participation at the upcoming 1909 General Conference session. While the Selmons recuperated in the United States, they gave missionary talks. At the 1909 General Conference, the Selmons played an active role. They joined with other missionaries to sing “a hymn in the Mandarin language,” with the translated title of “I once was a sinner bound in sin; Jesus set me free.” Immediately afterward, Bertha gave a report, dressed in Chinese garb, on the “Work for Women in China.” After the session, the Selmons spoke at several camp meetings. Their two adopted children, Ruth and Paul, “attracted a great deal of attention.” Their recruitment was effective, as more conferences pledged to financially support missionary work by supplying funds and even the salaries of new workers. When they left from Vancouver on October 20, 1909, they returned with five couples, one with a young child, as new “recruits” for mission service.

PUBLISHING WORK IN SHANGHAI (1910 ONWARD)

Upon their return to China, the Selmons remained in Shanghai, where Arthur edited the church’s paper, *Shi Chao Yueh Pao* (*The Signs of the Times*). Unfortunately, soon after their return, the publishing house burned down. Arthur helped rebuild, purchasing a new “diamond cylinder press, hand-power series,” along with ambitious new plans to expand the publishing work. A gas engine quickly increased their printing capacity. The hard work in the printing ministry paid rich dividends. In 1909 the average monthly issue has a circulation of 5,000 copies; by the end of 1910, the print-run was up to 12,000 copies. Similarly, the Sabbath calendar in 1910 sold 85,000 copies; by 1911, more than 200,000 copies were sold.

The year 1911 marked a severe famine in which many people died, and that ultimately sparked a violent revolution leading to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Many missionaries fled to the mission headquarters in Shanghai. The Selmons helped take care of them, praising the Lord that no missionary lives were lost. Unfortunately, the main missionary compound in Chang-sha was destroyed. The Selmons trained new missionaries about the culture and taught language classes. As things stabilized, Arthur led a group of missionaries to return to the mission and held evangelistic meetings. Afterward, they baptized nine individuals. They then went on an extended nine-week itinerary

that spanned four provinces. An additional 58 individuals were baptized at the meetings, held as many as four times a day, during the trip.

During 1912, Arthur took I. H. Evans, the new superintendent of the China Mission, on another evangelistic tour. During March and April of that year, they held meetings. One such “revival” meeting resulted in more than a hundred converts. Evans noted that these were not “rice Christians,” (individuals who sought to benefit economically without any genuine desire to convert) but individuals who were very sincere about their faith. Bertha continued to work on innovative ideas to help girls find ways to fund their education at the girls’ school. One such plan resulted in a doll-production business. By January 1913, Arthur had become superintendent of the East China Mission based in Shanghai.

A major initiative was the development of a dispensary in the marketplace to the east of the Shanghai Mission and press property. After two previous failed attempts, this third effort succeeded, making its debut on August 1, 1912. A second major initiative was the development of the China Mission Training School. When the school officially opened with 51 students on October 13, 1912, Arthur was listed as teaching science. By the end of the first school year, attendance had increased to 61. Church members around the world contributed their Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on March 28, 1914, to assist with the development of these institutions. Another major event at this meeting was the development of a program for colporteurs to sell books in the Chinese language.

In 1916, Arthur collaborated with Fred Lee to conduct a series of ministerial institutes. Their intention was to develop indigenous leadership for the Adventist Church in China. By August 1, 1916, the Selmons had traveled with the Loveland family to Peking (Beijing) to pioneer new work in that region but were delayed by a request to spend a year in Nanking training new missionaries in the Chinese language. That same year, when the Asiatic Division was organized, Arthur was placed in charge of the medical-missionary work for the division. Around this time, Bertha began to develop a series of readers for elementary schools suitable for the first five years of schooling.

In 1917, as the work of the denomination continued to grow, various missions were organized into an overarching union mission, called the North China Union Mission. Bertha served as medical secretary for the union. As the Selmons prepared for furlough, the outbreak of an influenza epidemic necessitated special measures such as urging missionaries to wear masks. As World War I came to an end, the Red Cross Hospital in Shanghai became available and became the new location for a significantly expanded Shanghai Sanitarium.

SECOND FURLOUGH AND FINAL YEARS

In 1918, the Selmons went on their second furlough to the United States. This time the Selmons sought postgraduate training, and their living expenses were sponsored by the denomination. They spent time at the College of Medical Evangelists in Loma Linda, California, and Hinsdale Sanitarium in Illinois, U.S.A. Like their earlier furlough, the Selmons once again visited a series of camp meetings. By early August 1919 the Selmons sailed on the *S.S. China* with a group of missionaries back to the land they loved so much.

After the Selmons returned home in June 1924, they worked as private physicians and practiced industrial medicine for W. K. Kellogg’s corn-flakes company. Arthur served as medical director for the Kellogg company and as assistant director of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. In this latter capacity he helped plan the foundation’s work at the Ann J. Kellogg School, a school for special-needs children. Bertha was one of the founders of the Maternal Health Center and served as its clinician from 1932 to 1943. Arthur died on May 16, 1931, at the age of 53. The General Conference sent its condolences to Bertha, thanking them for their work as “pioneers” of the denomination’s work “in inland China and later in connection with the medical work in Shanghai.” After his death, Bertha served as history editor of the *Medical Women’s Journal* and collected pictures and stories about female physicians. In 1942, she wrote a book about their experience as missionaries in China, *They Do Meet: Cross-Trails of American Physicians and Chinese People*. Bertha died in 1949 and is buried next to Arthur in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Michigan. ☪

* Adapted from a longer article “Selmon, Bertha Eugenia Loveland (1877–1949) and Arthur Clifford (1877–1931),” originally published in the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (ESDA), which can be accessed at <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=A8MF&highlight=Selmon>.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Quoted from the *New International Version* of the Bible. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
2. The spellings of the geographical names in China that were used when the Selmons served there have been retained.




PUBLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY DAY



I WILL BE THE Church

A small, stylized illustration of a white church building with a steeple and a cross on top, positioned to the right of the word "Church".


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