

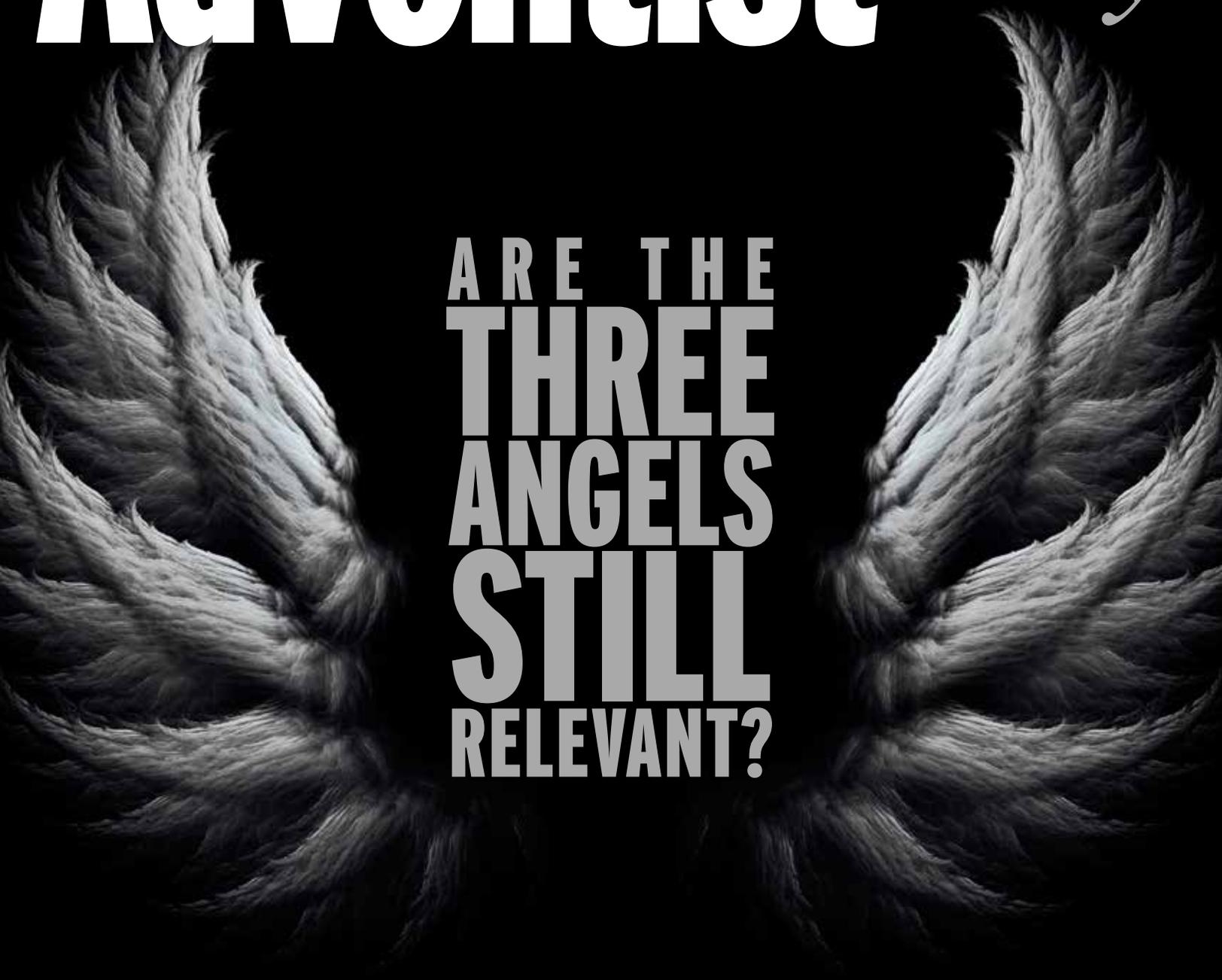
Ellen G. White's
Ordination Credentials

How to Disagree
With Church Leaders

Thoughts on an Ideal
Model Constitution

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Adventist *Today*



ARE THE
THREE
ANGELS
STILL
RELEVANT?



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Adventist Today brings contemporary issues of importance to Adventist Church members and is a member of The Associated Church Press. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an email to atoday@atoday.org. Voice: (503) 826-8600 Email: atoday@atoday.org Website: atoday@atoday.org or mail to: Adventist Today, PO Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135.

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Adventist Today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published quarterly by Adventist Today Foundation, 50800 SE Baty Rd, Sandy, OR 97055. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals. \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card.) Add \$10 for address outside North America. Periodical postage paid at Sandy, Oregon and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, P.O. Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135. Copyright © 2014 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

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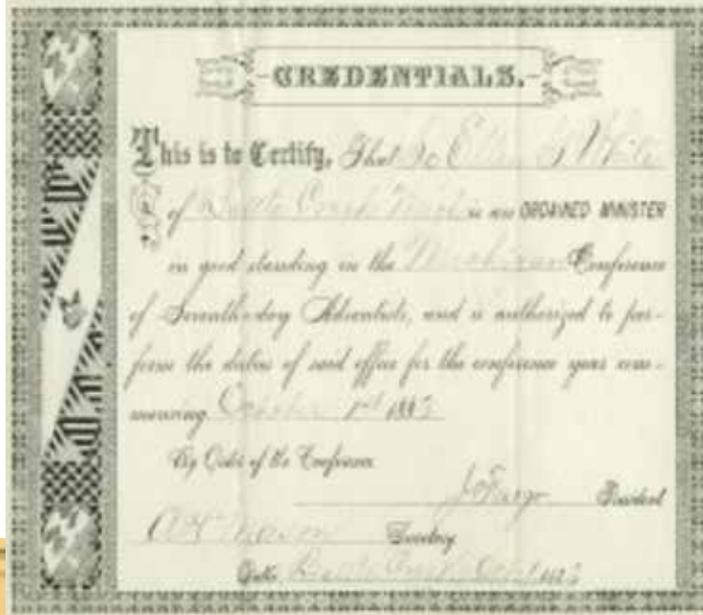
Ellen G. White's Ordination Credentials

By J. David Newman

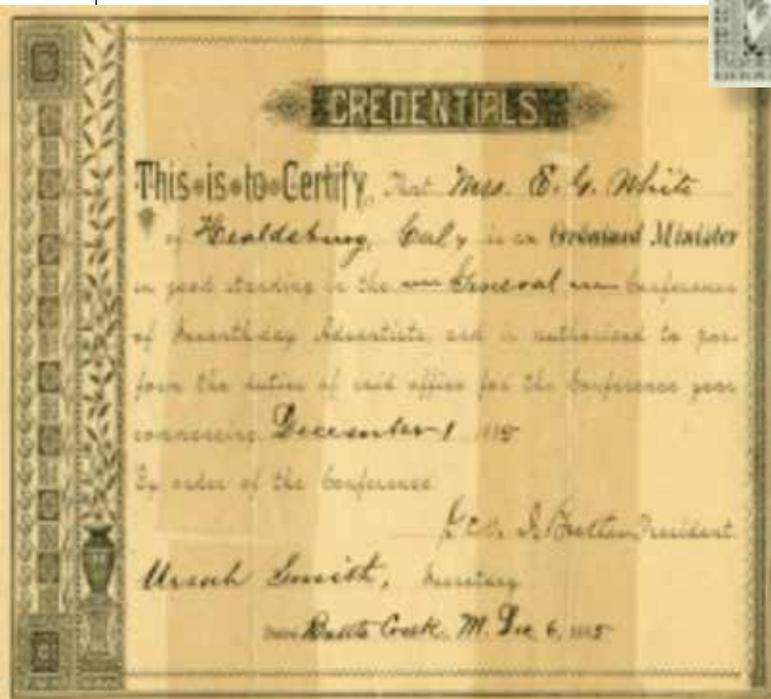
Given the controversy over women's ordination, I propose a solution. Simply issue ordination credentials to women pastors without the ceremony of the laying on of hands. In most cases, they have already had hands laid upon them as an elder or commissioned minister.

This is what the church did for Ellen G. White. We have six copies of her paper credentials that were issued during her lifetime. Five of them show that she was ordained. One shows lines through the letters of the word *ordination*. Here are the six credentials.¹

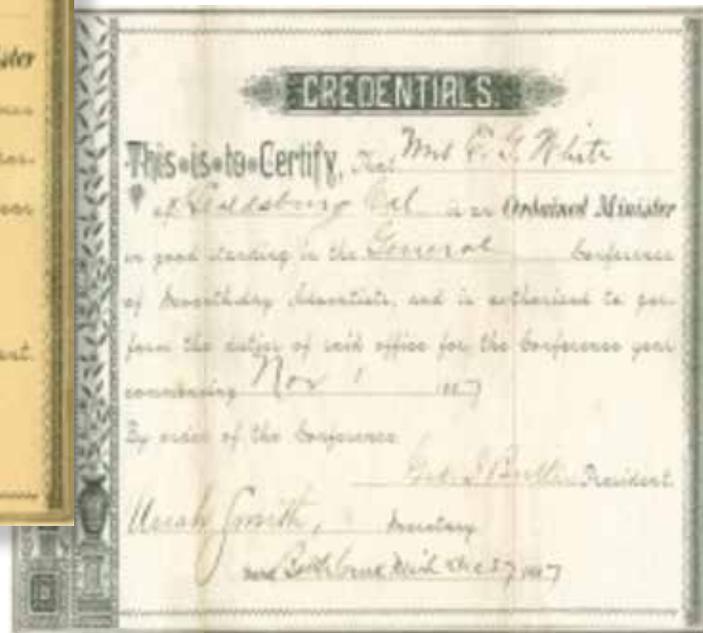
¹http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/egw_credentials/egw_credentials.htm



Michigan Credentials



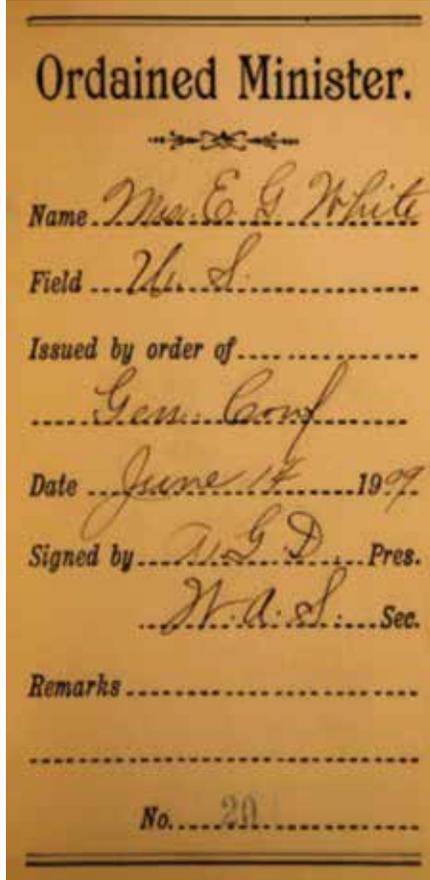
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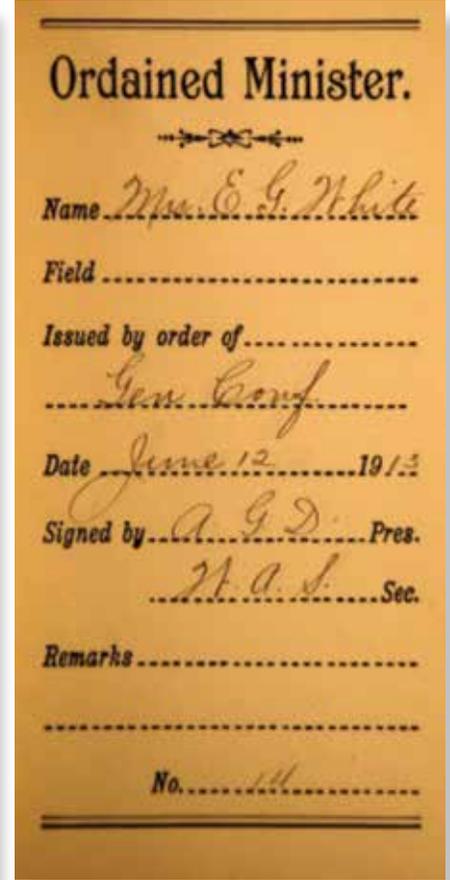
GC Credentials 1887



GC Credentials 1899



GC Credentials 1909



GC Credentials 1913

EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.

Adventist Today welcomes your letters on material published in the magazine. Short, timely letters have the best chance at publication. They may be edited for grammar and content. Please include your name and address. Send to: adventisttoday1966@gmail.com.

Adventist *Today*



Getting Into Heaven

“Is Getting Into Heaven Easier Than Getting Into the Adventist Church?” [Fall 2013] shows a refreshing independence of thought.

DAVID W.T. BRATTSTON
Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Canada

Your editorial was so appreciated (as always). What is disconcerting is that we as a worldwide movement don't stop to realize how foundational this is. Doing weekly church services; conducting committees and planning sessions; building buildings; and operating hospitals, publishing houses, elementary schools, academies, and universities becomes the essence of what we are about, rather than proclaiming the same gospel that Jesus proclaimed. We are making disciples of Adventism instead of Jesus. I know that few would acknowledge this. In fact, most would feel that making Adventist converts IS making disciples. ...

Lastly, David, in the light of this gospel, what if getting into heaven is not based on our getting THE LIST RIGHT—whether it is a list of things we must believe or do, or whether it is a list

of 28 doctrines we must believe, or 4, or just 1. Instead, what if Jesus eliminated the list altogether AS A REQUIREMENT FOR GOD'S FAVOR AND A TICKET TO HEAVEN. What if HE took care of the only requirement? He died FOR us (Rom. 5:8), redeemed us (Eph. 1:7), justified us (Rom. 5:9), and reconciled us (Rom. 5:10)! Because of that, 1 Corinthians 5:18-19 declares that we, as the Body of Christ, have been given the ministry of reconciliation—WHICH IS sharing the wonderful good news that “God does not count our sins against us!” There is NOT a list—at least for us. Jesus did the whole thing! At least to get us into heaven.

DON WATSON
Greenbrier, Tennessee

I found David Newman's easy method for getting into heaven [Fall 2013] troubling and contradictory. First, he insists several times there is “only one condition for entering heaven ... to believe, to trust in Jesus.” Then inexplicably he adds that “to get into heaven, you must be sincere in repenting...” Even his “one condition” consigns to hell members I've had in my churches—people in their twenties and thirties who were severely disabled (e.g., still in diapers and unable to speak). Surely Newman does not mean to exclude them from heaven because of their inability to believe in Jesus. Also, Newman's words, taken at face value, damn every human who has not heard a comprehensive presentation of the gospel. I don't think he really means that, either.

Beyond closing heaven to these people incapable of any faith in Jesus, Newman's words exclude many of us who have grown up in the church. He writes that to get into heaven, “you must be sincere in repenting of your past life and trusting wholly in Jesus for your salvation. ...

There is only one way to heaven, and that is to place your complete trust and allegiance in Jesus Christ.” “Wholly” and “complete” denote a level of spiritual development (perfection) far beyond most of us.

Rather than attempting to specify exactly what conditions persons must meet before God will allow them into heaven, we ought rather to focus on another of Newman's dicta: “entrance to heaven requires just one thing: grace.” This word offers hope for all kinds of people who find “faith,” especially the exclusive, highly specified faith of evangelicalism, problematic.

JOHN MCLARTY
Seattle, Washington

EDITOR REPLIES

Thank you to John McLarty for helping me to clarify. I am not excluding “people in their twenties and thirties who were severely disabled (e.g., still in diapers and unable to speak).” Neither am I excluding people who have never heard the name of Jesus. I was simply trying to say what Scripture says. Where the Bible is silent, I am silent. God is in the business of getting as many people into heaven as he can, not excluding them.

John feels that I contradict myself when I write that “to get into heaven, you must be sincere in repenting.” Now he feels that I am adding additional requirements. I do not consider these to be requirements. I was trying to describe what “trusting in Jesus” means. Perhaps one of the best ways to describe grace is what I heard in a sermon by Brad Thorpe at the Andrews Society of Religious Studies. He described grace as treating other people better than they deserve. That is how God treats us.

J. DAVID NEWMAN
Mt. Airy, Maryland



ARE THE
THREE
ANGELS
STILL
RELEVANT?



IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE REGARDING THE RELEVANCE OF the three angels' messages, four writers were given the assignment described below. You will observe that all four answered in very different ways.

In the devotional book *Maranatha*, Ellen White explains that God raised up the Adventist Church to prepare the world for his coming before the end of the 19th century: "Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith, and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, ... the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward."¹

We have ended the 19th century, passed through the 20th century, and are now well into the 21st century. So the big question looms: Is the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church still the same mission? If it is, why are we still here? If it is not, what should it be?

Elders Robert Wieland and Donald Short in the early 1950s tried to answer the "why" part with their manuscript *1888 Re-Examined*. Adventist theologian Herbert Douglass is well known for his "harvest principle." The General Conference is known for its Global Mission initiative (planting an Adventist presence in every unreached people group). But we are still here.

Please answer the following question: Why we are still here, and what do we need to be doing differently if we are to accomplish that mission (if indeed it is the same mission)? Sadly, the evangelical world has stolen a march on the Adventist emphasis on the second coming with their Rapture concept. We no longer seem to have much influence in that area. And regarding the other part of our name, referencing the Sabbath, no person of note in academia or pastor of one of the U.S. megachurches has accepted our view on the Sabbath.

¹ White, *Maranatha* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), p. 61.

THE CORE OF ADVENTISM

BY SIGVE TONSTAD

Many years have passed since I read Arthur W. Spalding's *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, all four volumes.¹ I don't remember whether I was a college student in Beirut, Lebanon, a senior in college at Andrews University, or perhaps already a medical student at Loma Linda University. But I remember that I did it on my own without prodding, and I remember that I found the reading gripping. The first volume in particular has a compelling narrative. Spalding puts the hope of the second coming of Jesus in the 19th century in the same category as the expectation of the disciples of Jesus in the first century. In Spalding's book, the disciples were true followers of Jesus, but they were mistaken with regard to the Master's plan. When Jesus headed to Jerusalem to die instead of going there to seize power, they were devastated (Luke 24:21). Even after the resurrection, as the clock was winding down on Jesus' last hour on Earth, they asked him the disappointing question, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6, NRSV).

Teaching Opportunities

In Spalding's book, the story of the hope and disappointment described in Luke and Acts serves two purposes. First, it validates the expectation of the second coming as the great, unrelieved yearning for believers in Jesus. When believers in the 19th century made the hope of the second coming the centerpiece of their message, therefore, they were not playing up a fringe belief.

Second, the disappointment of the first believers in Jesus demonstrates that being wrong does not make a commitment to a mistake something to be regretted, and it does not prove the mistaken person to be on distant terms with Jesus. Those who withdrew from Jesus in the first century in time to avoid the disappointment of the cross had more to regret than those who stayed the course. In the context of Luke and Acts, those who were "right" at that time were wrong, and those who were "wrong" were right. Similarly, says Spalding, the disappointment of the Millerites was the disappointment of people who were right even though they were wrong.

I was persuaded by this analogy years ago. Little has changed

in this regard today. I still revere the Millerites. I wish I had been one of them if I had lived at that time, even though I am forced to contemplate evidence in my life that I would have taken a condescending view of the movement or chosen to play it safe on the sidelines. Some disappointments are inevitable. Things may have sclerosed to the point that calculated steps are out of the question in order to bring about change. Disappointments are teaching opportunities; they are occasions for momentous revisions. In the case of the disciples, Jesus had plans quite different from the local, upwardly mobile future they had envisioned. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," he said (Acts 1:8, NRSV).

Present Truth in Our Time

For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, momentous changes in the outlook of a few Millerites still resonate as present truth in our time. I will highlight the three elements that mean the most to me. They begin with a conversation that took place in 1843 and made a great impression on young Ellen Harmon.

One day [1843] I listened to a conversation between my mother and a sister, in reference to a discourse which they had recently heard, to the effect that the soul had not natural immortality. Some of the minister's proof texts were repeated. Among them I remember these impressed me very forcibly: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezekiel 18:4. "The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything." Ecclesiastes 9:5. "Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality." 1 Timothy 6:15, 16. "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." Romans 2:7.

"Why," said my mother, after quoting the foregoing passage, "should they seek for what they already have?"

I listened to these new ideas with an intense and painful interest. When alone with my mother, I inquired if she really believed that the soul was not immortal. Her reply was, that she feared we had been in error on that subject, as well as upon some others.

"But, mother," said I, "do you really believe that the soul sleeps in the grave until the resurrection? Do you think that the Christian, when he dies, does not go immediately to heaven, nor the sinner to hell?"

She answered: "The Bible gives us no proof that there is an eternally burning hell. If there is such a place, it should be mentioned in the Sacred Book."

"Why, mother!" cried I, in astonishment, "this is strange talk for

you! If you believe this strange theory, do not let any one know of it; for I fear that sinners would gather security from this belief, and never desire to seek the Lord.”

“If this is sound Bible truth,” she replied, “instead of preventing the salvation of sinners, it will be the means of winning them to Christ. If the love of God will not induce the rebel to yield, the terrors of an eternal hell will not drive him to repentance. Besides, it does not seem a proper way to win souls to Jesus by appealing to one of the lowest attributes of the mind,—abject fear. The love of Jesus attracts; it will subdue the hardest heart.”²

Much is packed into this conversation, all of it as amazing and relevant today as it was then. Imagine the audacity of these lay people as they adopted beliefs completely at odds with some of the most hallowed tenets in the Christian tradition: no immortal soul, no eternal hell, and a God the reason for worship of whom would not be based on fear.

Daring to be Different

It took tremendous independence of mind, courage, and profound theological reflection to make changes of this magnitude. At the time when this conversation took place, the new beliefs were mere fringe items to the dominant belief in the second coming of Jesus. Judged from our secure perch nearly 170 years later, however, they carried the seeds of the post-Disappointment mission. “You will be my witnesses,” Jesus said to the disappointed and still misguided disciples just before his ascension to heaven (Acts 1:8, NRSV). Ellen Harmon and the disappointed believers in the 19th century heard Jesus say no less to them in their humiliating predicament. The disappointment was not the end or the beginning of the end. To borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill, it was only “the end of the beginning.”³

Consider for a moment the subject of anthropology, or, as it goes in Seventh-day Adventist terminology, “the state of the dead.” One hundred and twelve years after Ellen Harmon’s marvelous conversation with her mother, the Swiss theologian Oscar Cullmann delivered the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University. In his lecture, Cullmann argued that the Christian separation of the human person into a material body and an immaterial soul had its roots in the dualistic philosophy of Plato and was not an original Christian belief. “If we want to understand the Christian faith in the resurrection, we must completely disregard the Greek thought that the material, the bodily, the corporeal is bad and *must* be destroyed, so that the death of the body would not in any sense be the destruction of the true life,” said Cullmann.⁴ For this view, Cullmann brought upon himself a deluge of angry reactions and the charge that he

had betrayed a fundamental Christian belief! From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, Cullmann’s lecture lent luster to what by then was a core Adventist conviction, albeit a conviction that had not made much headway under our stewardship.

In a 2004 article in *The New York Times*, Paul Bloom, a popular professor of psychology at Yale University, admitted that one should have no illusions that the dualistic outlook of Plato (and mainstream Christianity) is a thing of the past. He claimed that for most people, the notion that the soul does not survive the death of the body “is a much harder pill to swallow than evolution,” also stating that conflicts over the makeup of the human person will be the greatest conflict between science and religion in the 21st century.⁵ Bloom’s version of a monist, indivisible anthropology is not the exact version Adventists are likely to adopt, but we should not be shy to agree that we are bodies through and through.

A Brain-based, Holistic View

The human self and sense of the self is a function of the brain. A brain-based view of the human self is one reason why the first Adventists decided to forswear system-altering substances like alcohol, tobacco, and coffee. The indivisible and intimate relation between the body and the human brain remains a medical and physiological frontier of daunting complexity and staggering potential. For instance, it is just now emerging that the rise in blood lactate levels in connection with exercise acts as a growth-enhancing, nerve-protective signal in the central nervous system that may help prevent devastating diseases like Alzheimer’s dementia.

A holistic view of the human person is an admission of radical finitude and absolute dependence. “A voice says, ‘Cry out!’” says the prophet Isaiah at the beginning of the most charged segment of prophetic speech in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:6, NRSV). “What shall I cry?” the prophet answers. “All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass,” the divine commissioner responds (verses 6-7, NRSV).

This, too, is part and parcel of the monist outlook, in our time beckoning to be preached to what may well be the most extreme mortality-defying and mortality-denying culture the world has ever seen. One example must suffice. “Can Google Solve Death?” TIME Magazine asked on its front cover a few months ago, adding reassuringly that it “would be crazy—if it weren’t Google.”⁶

The list of names now promoting a holistic anthropology

is more and more looking like a list of “who is who” in contemporary theology.⁷ And yet one feature is still distinctive in the Adventist outlook. While others are adopting a “bodied” view of the human person, they are less inclined to make it the breaking point.

Cosmic Dualism

When, by contrast, we locate this belief in the web of early Seventh-day Adventist convictions, its importance is immensely magnified. Assuming that these believers were onto something in their view of human reality, how will promoters of the indivisibility of the human person react in the face of evidence that the human self does indeed survive death and that the dead do indeed speak to us? Will we know what to do when the forces of evil play their strongest card, “three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet” (Rev. 16:13, NRSV)?

This prospect, here in the figurative construct of Revelation,

fact of sense, experience, and even science is that humans cannot die. According to this view, no one can so conduct themselves as to forfeit existence.

What then?

An Inconceivable Doctrine

The spotlight now moves from anthropology to theology, the most important part of the conversation between Ellen Harmon’s mother and her friend that Ellen reportedly overheard in 1843. These ordinary folks (but extraordinary believers) in New England did not dismiss hell only because it was ruled out by human finitude. Theology was a weightier matter than anthropology: It was inconceivable to them that a loving God could consign humans to endless torture—that “for the sins of a brief earthly life they [the lost] are to suffer torture as long as God shall live,” as Ellen White put it.⁹ Combining a sense of humanity and biblical argument, she found in this teaching “the indifference of the stoic” and “the cruelty of the savage.”¹⁰

FEAR AND LOVE ARE NOT ALLIES IN THE CAUSE OF BRINGING PEOPLE TO GOD; THEY ARE POLAR OPPOSITES. LOVE MUST DEFEAT THE OTHER.

puts pressure on a belief that many now share. In the thought-world of a writer like Ellen G. White, a monistic anthropology is indissolubly linked to a dualistic view of cosmic reality. The human person is bodied and whole, but the cosmos isn’t. In cosmic reality, Satan is gearing up to prove his contention that death is an illusion (Gen. 3:4).

“Little by little he has prepared the way for his master-piece of deception in the development of Spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. Says the prophet: ‘I saw three unclean spirits like frogs; ... they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.’ [Revelation 16:13, 14.] Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in his Word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion.”⁸

The concern of the person who wrote this, of course, was not to score a point for one belief above another but to embed these beliefs in matters of consequence. At issue is not to do well on a quiz about religious beliefs but to prevail in life. The spiritual and existential corollary to the satanic delusion that asserts itself as a

To whom must such a teaching be attributed? Her answer was clear and to the point: “Now the prince of darkness, working through his agents, represents God as a vengeful tyrant, declaring that He plunges into hell those who do not please Him, and causes them ever to feel His wrath; and that while they suffer unutterable anguish and writhe in the eternal flames, their Creator looks down upon them with satisfaction.”¹¹ Cosmic dualism and anthropological monism are blood brothers and twin sisters in this outlook, one reinforcing the importance of the other, both seeking to undo the damage to God’s reputation that the demonic imagination successfully implanted at the very heart of Christian theology. Here, remarkably, the outlook of a religious writer such as Ellen G. White has much in common with secular voices and critics of the Christian tradition. Let the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) be a case in point.

Consider now these reflections from Nietzsche’s book *On the Genealogy of Morals*, published in 1887, one year before the first edition of *The Great Controversy*. Nietzsche quotes the church father Tertullian for proof of his thesis that Christianity is a religion of unbridled *resentment*.

“Or if we wish to hear a stronger tone, a word from the mouth

of a triumphant father of the Church, who warned his disciples against the cruel ecstasies of the public spectacles—But why? Faith offers us much more,—says he,—something much stronger; thanks to the redemption, joys of quite another kind stand at our disposal; instead of athletes we have our martyrs; we wish for blood, well, we have the blood of Christ—but what then awaits us on the day of his return, of his triumph?”¹²

The Christian father who wishes to spare his fellow believers the cruelty of the Roman games cannot hide that his objection to cruelty runs only skin deep when the prospect of God-ordained torture is the source of his subsequent delight. Tertullian advertises the Day of Judgment as a much better show than the one playing in the Roman Theater, conjuring up images of poets and actors who will give the performance of their lives when God, as he alleges, burns them in the flames.

Preceding his reference to Tertullian, Nietzsche features two other Christian voices on the subject: Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the greatest moral theologian in the Roman Catholic tradition, and Dante (1265-1321), the foremost writer of the Italian Renaissance.

“For what is the blessedness of that Paradise? Possibly we could quickly surmise it; but it is better that it should be explicitly attested by an authority who in such matters is not to be disparaged, Thomas of Aquinas, the great teacher and saint. ‘Blissful, in the kingdom of heaven, they will see the sufferings of the damned so that their bliss should be more delightful to them.’”¹³

It should not be difficult to imagine Paradise. *Can it be anything other than freedom from suffering?* Nietzsche asks. But this intuition of the layperson hits widely off the mark. Correction by expert opinion is needed. Like Tertullian before him, Thomas Aquinas holds that the suffering of the damned enhances the joy of the redeemed. Indifference to suffering is in this scenario sanctified so as to be the normal state of mind in the world to come, linked as a matter of course to the joy of the redeemed and one of its main wellsprings. Nietzsche hears the same sentiment in Dante, taken from the latter’s journey into hell.

“Dante, as it seems to me, made a crass mistake when with awe-inspiring ingenuity he placed that inscription over the gate of his hell, ‘Me too made eternal love’: at any rate the following inscription would have a much better right to stand over the gate of the Christian Paradise and its ‘eternal blessedness’—‘Me too made eternal hate’—granted of course that a truth may rightly stand over the gate to a lie!”¹⁴

Which is better theology: Dante’s attempt to make hell an expression of the love of God, or Nietzsche’s outrage? Against

every fiber in the being of common sense, Dante resorts to a construct that makes eternal torture the work of eternal love. Nietzsche calls Dante’s effort a case of “awe-inspiring ingenuity,” thinking it self-evident that hell cannot conceivably be the invention of love. In his view, the eternal hell of Christian theology must be the concoction of eternal hatred. The prospect of eternal suffering is easily the foremost reason for Nietzsche’s belief that Christianity is a religion of resentment.

Adventist Insight

What can an Adventist witness bring to this predicament? Nietzsche’s objection to the Christian tradition hits the notes that Ellen White will strike in *The Great Controversy*.¹⁵ This means that the Adventist witness does not need to carry the awful weight of an appalling theological tradition, and it also suggests that our witness should be less fearful of, and less hostile to, secular voices that are critical of the Christian tradition. Above all, however, it means that the cosmic conflict perspective must not be allowed to get stale and moldy. How, indeed, was it possible for Christianity to adopt a view of God so cruel and demonic except for the fact that a demonic intelligence succeeded marvelously in his smear campaign against God? How, too, does this view of cosmic reality continue to assert itself in present reality as we approach and pass the 170th anniversary of the Great Disappointment?

When Paul was addressing believers in *his* time who were vexed by the apparent delay of the second coming of Jesus, he turned to the theme of cosmic conflict and to the revelatory logic of God’s intervention in history. His second letter to restive believers in Thessalonica is under-projected and under-appreciated, but it fills out the panoramic vision of Paul’s theology to a degree that yet another book about the theology and preaching of Paul is begging to be written. In Galatians (and a few years later in Romans), Paul concentrates all the force of apocalyptic thought and all his rhetorical powers into showing that God’s faithfulness has been revealed in the faithfulness of Christ (*pistis Iesou Christou*).¹⁶ In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, by contrast, Paul makes it clear that time is continuing for the *apocalypsis* of the opposing side in the cosmic conflict to become fully manifest. The text is elusive because it is allusive, and it is allusive because it is mainly a refresher and reminder of what Paul had told the recipients of the letter in person on a previous occasion (2 Thess. 2:5). The one who said in his heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13-14, NRSV) will be given opportunity to

do just that, Paul tells the Thessalonians. Where, in the realm of anthropology, the demonic aspiration is to achieve persuasive survivals of the human self after death, his ambition in the realm of theology is to impersonate Jesus and be a counterfeit God! This hair-raising scenario is not the harebrained concoction of a 19th-century sect, but rather it is the witness of the New Testament in the Synoptic Gospels, in the Book of Revelation, and in the letters of Paul. The apparent delay of the *Parousia* is only that: an *apparent* delay—the “delay” already factored into the divine plan.¹⁷ The *Parousia* of Jesus will shockingly be preceded by the *parousia* of the lawless one, posing as though he is the real thing! In Paul’s allusive vision in Second Thessalonians, he says, “And you know what is now restraining [him] so that he may be fully exposed when his time comes. For already the mystery of lawlessness is hard at work, only [awaiting the moment] when the one who now restrains [has disappeared] from the middle” (Phil. 2:6-7).¹⁸

According to this reading, the Restrainer who will step away from “the middle” so as to make room for the fake Jesus and the equally fake god is ... God! If we are puzzled by the logic of these moves, it is not that God is facilitating the deceptive work of Satan but that God is allowing the exposé of cosmic deceit to run to completion. When *apocalypsis* retains the meaning of “showing a thing up for what it is,”¹⁹ this is precisely what is happening.

This brings us to the third and last element I wish to highlight in the conversation that Ellen Harmon’s mother had with a friend and then with her 16-year-old daughter in 1843. For this part of the conversation to stand to its full height, we will be well served by almost any passage in the New Testament attributed to John. “The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil,” says the first letter that bears John’s name (1 John 3:8, NRSV). And then this: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love” (1 John 4:18, NRSV). We hear the same melody in the words of Ellen Harmon’s mother, this forgotten mother to Adventism. Fear is competing with love because of the demonic misrepresentation of God. Fear and love are not allies in the cause of bringing people to God; they are polar opposites. Love must defeat the other. And perfect love will do just that: it will cast out fear.

The three tenets I have explored here anchor the ministry of healing that should be in the foreground of our witness in the days that lie ahead, even more than in the years that are past. They beckon us to explore and spell out theological, political, economic, and ecological implications more fully,²⁰ a task

concerning which the urgency is surpassed only by opportunity. If we turn our attention to this task, we will be less at a loss to know our *raison d’être*, less morbidly introspective, less nostalgic, and more awed by God and by our calling. For me, today, it still begins where it began: no immortal soul, no eternal hell, and a God the reason for worship of whom is love and not fear.

On a lesser but final note, recalling that I have drawn my points from a conversation involving three women, we cannot afford not to listen to the women in our midst.

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¹ Published in 1961 by Review and Herald.

² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), pp. 48-49.

³ From a speech in November 1942.

⁴ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 26.

⁵ Paul Bloom, “The Duel Between Body and Soul,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 10, 2004.

⁶ TIME Magazine, Sept. 30, 2013, cover.

⁷ See, for instance, Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and Newton Maloney, *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998); Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

⁸ White, *The Great Controversy* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1888), p. 561.

⁹ *ibid.* (1911 ed.), p. 535.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 534.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Horace B. Samuel (New York: Boni and Liveright, n.d. [orig. German 1887]), p. 33.

¹³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 33; translation here that of Martha C. Nussbaum, “Objectification and Internet Misogyny,” in *The Offensive Internet: Privacy, Speech and Reputation*, edited by Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 68.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, p. 33.

¹⁵ White, *The Great Controversy* (1911 ed.), p. 535.

¹⁶ See Sigve K. Tonstad, “*Pistis Christou*: Reading Paul in a New Paradigm,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 37-59; *idem.*, “The Revisionary Potential of ‘Abba, Father!’ in the Letters of Paul,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2007), pp. 5-18; *idem.*, “Inscribing Abraham: Abraham, Apocalyptic, and the Akedah in Galatians,” paper presented at the St. Andrews Conference on Galatians and Christian Theology, July 12, 2012.

¹⁷ Sigve K. Tonstad, “The Restrainer Removed: A Truly Alarming Thought (2 Thess. 2:1-12),” *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2007), pp. 133-151.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁹ D.E.H. Whiteley, “The Threat to Faith: An Exegetical and Theological Re-Examination of 2 Thessalonians 2,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 21 (1970), p. 168.

²⁰ I have made an attempt to present a “more full” view of the Sabbath, for instance, in *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2009).

FULFILLING THE MISSION OF THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

BY EDWIN REYNOLDS

I was asked to write an essay giving my opinion on the *raison d'être* of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and whether or not it is fulfilling the mission for which it was raised up. As a fourth-generation Adventist minister and teacher, I have a particular interest in this topic. Why are we still here? Have we failed in our purpose and mission as a church? What will it take for us to accomplish the purposes for which God brought us into existence as a church and to finish the work He has given us to do?

In her book *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White begins the history of the early Christian church with this well-known statement: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”²¹ While this statement refers to the mission of the Christian church in general, it must be an integral part of the mission of the Adventist church as well.

Sister White makes a similar statement in *Testimonies for the Church*: “The mission of the church of Christ is to save perishing sinners. It is to make known the love of God to men and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love. The truth for this time must be carried into the dark corners of the earth, and this work may begin at home. The followers of Christ should not live selfish lives; but, imbued with the Spirit of Christ, they should work in harmony with Him.”²² This statement adds an additional feature.

Instead of speaking generically about carrying the gospel to the world, it speaks of carrying “the truth for this time,” which we like to refer to as “present truth.” This brings the mission of the church into our own context, what we like to call “the time of the end,” by which we usually mean the time after the end of Daniel’s long time prophecies that bring the reader into the time of the end. This is thought to begin at the end of the 1260 days, in 1798, or at least at the end of the 2300 days, in 1844. At least since 1844, we have been living in the time of the end, during which there are no more time prophecies and Christ can come whenever He is ready—or at least whenever we are ready. Reference to the church since 1844 points to the rise of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a reform movement within Protestant Christianity, but to what does “the truth for this time” refer? What is the present truth in these last days that we are to carry to the dark corners of the Earth? This is not merely the same as the truths the Christian church has taught through the ages. It is a renewal and reformation of important biblical truths that have been lost during the ages of the church’s apostasy by compromise with paganism and worldly philosophy. There are a number of “testing truths” that have been restored since 1844, including the doctrines of the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the spirit of prophecy. It was necessary for these important teachings to be restored so that the full gospel could be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all nations, after which the end would come, according to Jesus’ prophetic words in Matthew 24:14.

A Reformation in Doctrine

I believe that the Adventist church was raised up to accomplish a reformation in Bible doctrine that needed to take place to bring the full truth of the gospel to the world before the end could come. I find in Revelation 10 a depiction of the development of a group of people engaged in the study of Bible prophecy who, after a bitter disappointment in their expectation of the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel at the time of the sixth trumpet of Revelation, are instructed (in the person of the representative prophet John) that they must prophesy again to many peoples, nations, languages, and rulers. This is clearly a prophetic movement. This movement seems also to be pointed to in Revelation 12:17, after the time and times and half a time of verse 14 (and also of Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, as well as the equivalent periods in Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6; and 13:5), when the dragon makes a special attack on the remnant of the woman’s offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. These two characteristics, which define the remnant people of God, tell us that they are known not only

for the message they proclaim, but also for the lives they live. They demonstrate or model the Christian lifestyle taught and modeled by Jesus. That becomes a witness to the world to help prepare it for the return of Christ.

I find the same movement pointed to in the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12, the last major warning messages to be given to the world before the close of human probation. These messages are not being preached today by any church other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They point to concepts that are largely unique to the Adventist Church, including the call to worship God as Creator in the context of the language of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, the announcement of a pre-Advent judgment having begun, the fall of spiritual Babylon with an implied call out, and an announcement of an executive judgment on those who worship the beast and its image and who receive its mark. The parallel in verse 12 with Revelation 12:17 further helps to make this connection: “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, ESV). The saints, or believers, here share key components with the remnant of Revelation 12:17. The messages they bear are lived out by their faith in action, and they center on Jesus and His commandments, especially the keeping of the fourth commandment, which is pointed to in the first angel’s message as a key issue at this time in history. Despite the difficult circumstances they will face, as pointed to in Revelation 13, these believers, like the three Hebrew worthies in Daniel 3, are faithful in their steadfast endurance in the face of coercive laws to worship the beast and its image and the threat of death should they refuse to bow to false forms of worship.

We are a people with a special mission. We are not here just to do more of the same that other churches are doing. We are reformers, using the Bible to bring back teachings lost to the church and preparing people for the last great spiritual conflict and the soon return of Jesus. In order to do this more effectively in the context of the last days, God has given to this church the gift of prophecy, the blessing of special revelation to supplement the biblical revelation and to direct us back time and again to the source of truth, the holy Scriptures.

A Demonstration of God’s Love

But it is not enough to know the truth; we must practice it faithfully. Ellen White states: “Christ has given to the church a sacred charge. Every member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that the Saviour

desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour’s love.”³ We are to live out the love of God, to represent to the world Christ’s Spirit and character. This, too, will contribute to hastening the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mrs. White explains: “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

“It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for, but also to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.”⁴

This passage tells us not only what Christ wants from us before He will return, but also why He has not yet returned. Clearly, the church has a significant work to do before its mission on Earth is complete. We tend to attribute the “delay” in Christ’s return to a failure to complete the mission of the gospel to the world. But we need to go back a step further. To what do we credit our failure to complete our mission of the gospel to the world? To a shortage of workers? Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38, ESV).

We may need to pray more earnestly for laborers and volunteer ourselves, but this is not the major problem. Do we attribute our failure to lack of funding? Perhaps we are too stingy with our giving for evangelism and missions. It is true that the stewardship of the church members seldom, if ever, reaches the standard that Christ has given for His people. Surely we can do better. However, this is not the reason for our failure.

Could it be due to poor evangelistic methods? No doubt our methods can be improved, but poor methods cannot take the blame for our dismal failure to hasten the Lord’s return.

A Transformation of Character

In the passage cited above, Ellen White actually points to the cause of our failure as a people to hasten Christ’s return. She says, “Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel,” the harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the ripened grain. The fruit she mentions is not, in the context, converts to the gospel but rather the fruit of the Spirit manifest in the life and character. The character of Christ needs to be perfectly

reproduced in God's people. Sister White tells us, "If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one."⁵ Instead of winning millions, we could be winning hundreds of millions. "By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."⁶ It seems that too many of us are not truly converted. We have not allowed the Spirit and grace of God to transform the character and make us loving and lovable Christians.

The world is looking for a demonstration of the power of the gospel to transform the life, but we have failed to provide that demonstration. The primary reason why people of other faiths have rejected Christianity is not because of the teachings of Jesus, which are widely upheld as a model of great teaching, but because of the failure of His followers to be able to live up to His teachings. If Jesus is the only one who could model His teachings, then they are not useful for the rest of humanity. We must

First, there has to be a recognition of our need. We are not going to receive any such thing unless we ask, and we are not going to ask unless we sense our need. We are not going to sense our need unless we are confronted by God's word and spend time reflecting on the moral distance between ourselves and the model Man, who is the perfect reflection of the character and glory of God. This recognition, and the offer of grace from God, leads to repentance and a desire for forgiveness and reformation, a turning away from sin—not only from sinful acts, but also from the desire to sin or to continue to allow sin's power to dominate in our lives (Romans 6).

Once we sincerely reject sin's power in our lives, repent, and turn to God for help, He sends us His Spirit to transform our minds and enable us to make the daily choice to reject sin's dominance over us. Sin still resides in our nature, and the constant battle takes place between the law of sin that is in our nature and the law of our mind, which now assents to the law of God and wants to obey it (Romans 7). Only the power of the Holy Spirit in the life can set us free from the law of sin and death and enable us to live a life pleasing to God (Romans 8). This will not happen apart from a daily devotional life of Bible study,

THE HEARTS OF MEN AND WOMEN HAVE NOT CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY, AND THEY STILL RESPOND TO THE LOVE AND GRACE OF GOD BEING PROCLAIMED IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT BY PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN CHANGED BY THE GOSPEL.

provide a living demonstration that Jesus Christ's teachings work for everyday people, not just for the Founder of that religion, who claimed to be an incarnation of the deity, a unique case with special powers from God. Satan's charge is that God's laws cannot be kept, and it is unfair for God to expect us to do so but then threaten punishment and death for our failure to be able to keep them.

How Do We Do It?

The reality is that, apart from His Spirit, power, and grace, we are unable to keep God's law. So, the secret to our success lies not in keeping God's law and perfectly reflecting His character, but in obtaining His Spirit, power, and grace to transform us and enable us to do so. How do we achieve that?

prayer, and rejoicing in His grace, which means that we will share our transforming experience with those around us, encouraging them to make similar choices and reap similar benefits. This witness under the power of the Spirit is what transformed the individuals in the early church and enabled them to take the gospel to the world in a single generation.⁷ There is no other solution to finishing the task that God has given this church to accomplish.

What Is Holding Us Back?

But what is keeping us from repenting and turning to God for help in a serious way? Why do we continue day after day just living our lives as though we had plenty of time, or as though someone else is going to finish the work, or as though God will pour out His Spirit

automatically when He is ready, with no need for a preparatory work to be done in our lives? Christ's message to Laodicea seems to speak directly to our generation: "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17, ESV). Jesus has the remedies for our spiritual lethargy and indifference, but we have to actively seek for them, to purchase them from Him at the cost of what we are asked to give up in exchange. The divine Salesman is knocking at the door (v. 20). Will we respond and open to Him? Will we purchase the solutions He brings to us? Will we enter into fellowship with Him?

Ellen White follows her statement from *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, which I quoted near the beginning of this article, with these words: "There are causes for the present coldness and unbelief. The love of the world and the cares of life separate the soul from God. The water of life must be in us, and flowing out from us, springing up into everlasting life. We must work out what God works in. If the Christian would enjoy the light of life, he must increase his efforts to bring others to the knowledge of the truth. His life must be characterized by exertion and sacrifices to do others good; and then there will be no complaints of lack of enjoyment."⁸

This reference to the "love of the world and the cares of life" as causes for coldness and unbelief is an apparent allusion to Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils recorded in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. In Jesus' explanation to His disciples, He showed that the different soils represent different kinds of hearers in their response to hearing the word of God. As Adventists, we all have heard the word of God, but we respond variously. Jesus said, "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22, ESV). We are allowing the materialism of this life to choke the word so that it cannot bear fruit in our lives. This was Laodicea's problem, and it is the distinctive characteristic of our age.

The church today is affluent, prosperous, and comfortable. It has become institutionalized and too often tends to operate more like a corporation than like a church. We follow the business model even in our efforts at evangelism and church growth. To learn more effective methods of promoting the gospel message and winning converts, we study marketing and advertising trends rather than the work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. When church leadership calls us to pray and to seek revival and reformation, we may be tempted to scoff at such old-time evangelistic fervor. We have been educated to look to what works in the modern world for our solutions, not what worked for

Peter, John, and Paul in the first Christian century. Yet the hearts of men and women have not changed significantly, and they still respond to the love and grace of God being proclaimed in the power of the Spirit by people whose lives have been changed by the gospel.

Going Forward With Power

So, what is the secret to the successful mission of the church and the finishing of the commission to take the gospel to the world? I believe that it is nothing different from what it was at the beginning of the church. Jesus said to the disciples back then, when they inquired regarding the fulfillment of prophecy and the wrapping up of the kingdom of God on Earth, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8, ESV). Jerusalem is wherever we find ourselves: our home, the center of our mission field. Judea is our local and regional area. Samaria is the neighboring territory that we would prefer to avoid, though God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Finally, the world is ultimately our mission field, and God has given us today the tools to reach the world with the gospel. The key to all of this, however, is not our well-researched and sophisticated methods. It is the power of the Holy Spirit for personal witnessing. And we will not receive that power until, as Jesus directed, we go to the prayer room and do not depart until we are all together in unity and have received the promise of the Father to impart His Spirit to us in its fullness (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit will provide not only power for witnessing but also unity to bring hearts to cooperate together and improve our witness. The Spirit will also impart wisdom to understand the best methods for taking the gospel to our neighbors and to the world. We know that it will be under the power of the "latter rain" of the Holy Spirit that the "loud cry" of the fourth angel will extend the closing messages of the three angels of Revelation 14 with power to the whole world. This work must begin at home, in the hearts of the members of the church. It will not be achieved by a special program or campaign of the church. It will be accomplished by the simultaneous witness of the power of the Holy Spirit in millions of transformed lives. It is within our power to hasten the coming of Jesus—not through better education, not through superior organization and administration, and not through more effective use of media, but through the work of the Spirit in our own hearts.

What will you and I do to help to hasten Christ's coming this

year? How important is it to us to achieve the mission of Christ for the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How committed are we to reflect the character of Christ to the world and prepare ourselves and our neighbors for heaven? It's not up to the church. It's up to us.

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¹ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 9.

² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1875), p. 381.

³ White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1973), p. 128.

⁴ White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900), p. 69.

⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), p. 189.

⁶ White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), p. 470.

⁷ See Col. 1:23; Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 593; idem, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 633.

⁸ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 381.

wrong people die and the wrong people live. I think God is far too selective in his saving miracles. And the natural disasters are appalling. How do I make sense out of all that?

Actually, I don't try very hard to make sense of it. But I do take comfort in the knowledge that Scripture illustrates the same inequities. Three quick examples: (1) **Psalms of complaint.** Over half the psalms are complaints about prayers not answered in a timely manner or ones not answered at all. (2) **Jesus' healing miracles.** Jesus healed people left and right—but in such a helter-skelter manner, and he did not heal them all. At the pool of Bethesda, for example, Jesus healed just one man, a cripple of 38 years (John 5:1-15). The rest of the invalids suffered on. (3) **John the Baptist.** Jesus applauded his forerunner but left him in prison to be beheaded by Herod. He didn't even visit him. In short, I find it helpful simply to recognize that my perspective is not God's. He rightly expects me to be fair in my little world, but his grasp of fairness is beyond me. C.S. Lewis is helpful here: "Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask—half our great theological and metaphysical problems—are like that."¹

The Inclination to Believe

In that connection, I must share a growing conviction, namely, that the inclination to believe is most likely a "gift" of genetics and body chemistry, in other words, a gift of God. I know the crucial questions, but I find myself hard-wired for belief. I suspect that I am an incurable believer and an incurable Adventist. Even if future experiences could change that, for now, all I can do is describe the Adventism that appeals to this incurably religious heart of mine.

But I must also address the crucial implication of the previous paragraph: If my inclination to believe is a gift of God, is the skeptical impulse also one of his gifts? Most likely. In fact, I am convinced that all of our initial impulses are nonvolitional. We can change, but only God knows how much and how quickly. From what I have seen, a sizeable percentage of the population is ready simply to accept authority, while another segment is eager to challenge it. Both "gifts" have their place. Without skeptics, the hard questions don't get asked; but without those who naturally "trust and obey," family, church, and culture in general would all be in for a rough ride.

Two important aspects of my life have pointed me to the conclusion that our diverse gifts come from God. First, I was privileged to complete my doctoral studies at the University of

WHY ADVENTISM?

BY ALDEN THOMPSON

Writing about Adventist mission is a rare treat for me. To echo a line from Augustine, "Many things I learned that I never knew before, just by writing." Finding ourselves still here some 170 years after the Great Disappointment may be a cause of embarrassment for some. But checking my pulse, I find myself more enthusiastic than ever about this unruly movement known as Seventh-day Adventism. Am I out of my mind? I don't think so. Let me tell you why.

One of my seminary teachers in the 1960s, Edward Heppenstall, told us more than once that he required two things of his faith: (1) that it should stand to reason, and (2) that it should stand up under the wear and tear of everyday life. I like that. For me, my Adventist heritage passes the test—with flying colors, even.

Now I don't intend to gloss over the pain that confronts us in this evil world. I am constantly reminded that the priorities on my prayer list don't readily match God's priorities. So often the

Edinburgh under the tutelage of a professor who was a former believer. At Edinburgh I discovered the enormous diversity of experiences in the Old Testament. And I should note that nonbelievers are generally much better at seeing diversity than believers; when driven by anger, they can point out diversity with intensity and mockery, fearlessly using the word “contradiction,” a poison pill for devout believers.

So I saw the diversity. But unlike my professor, I did not lose my faith. And this is where the second important aspect comes in to play: the key supporting role of Ellen White in my life of faith. Quite frankly, she enabled me to see the diversity and still believe. Indeed she helped transform a potential problem into an exciting solution. In the introduction to *The Great Controversy*, for example, she said that the books of the Bible were written “by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments.”²² I never would have been brave enough to say that on my own nickel. Later I discovered her astonishingly postmodern perspective on the value of recognizing the diversity of Bible writers and Bible teachers. In *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, she argues that it is “because the minds of men differ”²³ that we need the different writers of the Bible. And she contends that the same diversity exists now: “So today the Lord does not impress all minds in the same way. Often through unusual experiences, under special circumstances, He gives to some Bible students views of truth that others do not grasp. It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of teaching all that should be taught.”²⁴ With her help, I began to see the rampant diversity in my students and colleagues. Yet in spite of our diversity, indeed because of it, each of us can hold firmly to our Advent hope, drawing what we need from Scripture.

A Framework for Understanding

Looked at from a more structured perspective, Adventism’s appeal for me is that it offers a threefold framework within which I can understand the past, live in the present, and hope for the future. I’ll explain.

1. The great controversy between good and evil: A model for understanding the past. The Adventist understanding of the great controversy between good and evil provides an essential framework for addressing the theodicy issue, the all-consuming question of modernity. How can a God who is both all good and all-powerful produce a miserable world like the one in which we live? Adventists, solidly rooted in the Arminian/Wesleyan free-will tradition, are driven to ask that question. By contrast, those in the Augustinian/Calvinist predestinarian tradition don’t ask that question at all: How dare one insult the Maker of

the universe by questioning his justice and righteousness? God is sovereign and free and does what he chooses. If you are a Calvinist—or a Calvinist Adventist (of which there are many)—that is your conviction.

Those differences in perspective loom large when it comes to interpreting the Bible. The defenders of a sovereign God declare that he can and will impose his way on a rebellious universe. Those in the free-will tradition are compelled to say that God must take into account the ravages of sin, reaching people where they are and seeking to *win* them back to God’s way—not thump them, but *win* them. The difference between winning and thumping is huge, and it dramatically shapes one’s approach to the “difficult” passages of Scripture. Yet both traditions stand on an important chunk of common ground, namely, the longing for God’s will to be established in the universe. The goal is the same, but motivating forces differ and will appeal to different people. The difference may be close to the diversity noted by Paul: “What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick [thumping you] or with love in a spirit of gentleness [winning you]?” (1 Cor. 4:20, NRSV).

My free-will perspective makes it much easier for me to say that Jesus is the clearest revelation of God (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). But the nasty backspin lurking in that statement troubles some, for it implies that God’s other revelations are not as clear. So why would a good God give revelations that are not as clear? Because those “lesser” revelations represent the only way a good God could reach—and win—creatures immersed in a sinful world. That perspective allows me to explore every aspect of Scripture, even difficult and horrific ones, because I see them simply as essential steps toward God’s best and clearest revelation in Jesus.

An important clue to this approach is suggested in 1 Corinthians 10:11, where Paul uses the word “example” to describe the events that happened to ancient Israel: “All these things happened to them as examples *for us*” (NLT, emphasis mine). I have often used the word “casebook” to suggest that much of Scripture—except for the enduring law pyramid of the one great command (love), the two great commands (love to God, love to one another), and the Ten Commandments—is more like a “casebook” than a “codebook.”²⁵ Scripture does not tell us when to apply a particular passage. Should we *not answer* a fool according to his folly (Prov. 26:4)? Or should we *answer* a fool according to his folly (v. 5)? Scripture simply does not tell us when to shut up or to speak up. We have a choice. “Example” is a softer (more biblical?) word than “casebook” and may make it easier for some to see the point I am making, namely, that the Bible and Ellen White come to us largely as *illustrative*

authorities. The many and differing examples are a call to earnest prayer as we struggle to be faithful to God in all things. The examples are permanently rooted in Scripture. But our use of them grows out of our relationship with God.

Am I treading on dangerous ground? Of course; but all ground is dangerous in this world. And Scripture itself declares that my understanding always falls short of the divine reality: “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 higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9, NRSV). Getting at the same point, Ellen White wrote: “God and heaven alone are infallible.”⁶ God is always beyond my reach, but I have both the privilege and the

That moves us in the direction of what might be called “Christian humanism”—not “secular” humanism, but “Christian.” In short, when we are fully Christian, we are fully human. Those familiar with the whole range of Ellen White’s writings will sense that more buoyant perspective in the book *Education* (1903), and in her post-1888 writings on the life of Christ. Two quotes, one from 1854 (*Experience and Views*) and one from 1892 (*Steps to Christ*), illustrate the contrast between the reluctant God of her early years and the eager-to-save God of her later years.⁸

1854: “Said the angel, ‘Think ye that the Father yielded up His dearly beloved Son without a struggle? No, no. It was even a struggle with the God of heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give His beloved Son to die for him.’”

A FREE-WILL PERSPECTIVE ALLOWS ME TO RECOGNIZE THAT WHEN JESUS SUMMARIZES HIS TEACHING, HE FOCUSES ON THE HUMAN-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP MORE THAN THE GOD-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP.

responsibility of describing everything in Scripture to the best of my ability so that I can see how God has dealt with fallen humanity in the past as a guide for the way we treat God’s children today. The result is a healthy uncertainty, just enough to remind me that I need to counsel with my brothers and sisters in Christ. That’s the point of an Ellen White testimony to a brother who was both too heavy-handed and too independent: “You need to educate yourself, that you may have wisdom to deal with minds. You should with some have compassion, making a difference, while others you may save with fear, pulling them out of the fire [Jude 22-23]. Our heavenly Father frequently leaves us in uncertainty in regard to our efforts.”⁷

A free-will perspective allows me to recognize that when Jesus summarizes his teaching, he focuses on the human-human relationship more than the God-human relationship. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summarizes God’s law in terms of the first command (love God) and the second (love others). But when he is most succinct, Jesus focuses on the second great command, not the first: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12, NRSV). Paul does the same: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14, NRSV).

1892: “Jesus said, ‘Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.’ John 10:17. That is, ‘My Father has so loved you that He even loves Me more for giving My life to redeem you.’”

The buoyant merging of the divine and the human into a common goal for both is reflected in another quotation from *The Desire of Ages* that is without an earlier parallel: “Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you’ (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts.”⁹

That positive perspective finds a ready echo in the writings of George MacDonald (1824-1905), Scottish author, poet, and Christian minister: “The work is His, but we must take our willing share. When the blossom breaks forth in us, the more it is ours the more it is His.”¹⁰

At the close of *The Great Controversy* (1911 edition), Ellen White penned a vivid picture of the universe after God’s victory in the great struggle between good and evil. While much of the book reflects the dominant issues of the author’s era (1827-1915),

its concluding vision is a timeless one, describing in passionate detail a kingdom where a good God has *won* the hearts of his children:

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. ...

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”¹¹

That is the overarching framework that enables me to make sense out of what I find in Scripture. And for that I am very grateful.

2. The Adventist understanding of law: A gracious guide for living in the present. Traditional evangelical circles typically understand law within a law/grace matrix: Law condemns, grace saves. In such a model, law rarely feels like good news. Yet the Old Testament unashamedly proclaims law as “gospel,” with Moses as its most enthusiastic evangelist. He cites the admiration of Israel’s neighbors: “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” Then he continues exuberantly: “For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?” (Deut. 4:6-8, NRSV). No wonder Psalm 119, that granddaddy of all psalms, is simply one long celebration of law.

But the New Testament turns the tables, tussling with law in ways that are quite absent from the Old. Nothing in the Old Testament even comes close to Peter’s exasperated reference to “a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10, NRSV)—a reference to God-given laws, no less. In Romans 7, Paul candidly admits his struggle with law: “With my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25, NRSV). Those who follow Jesus can triumphantly move from the turmoil of Romans 7 to the liberation of Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (NRSV). But that transition from agony to joy is unknown in the Old Testament, for in it the law is already “gospel.”

Not all evangelical voices, however, simply portray Old Testament law as a bad-guy counterfoil to grace. After all,

even in Romans 7, Paul declares that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12, NRSV). An intriguing example of the “positive” use of law by an evangelical physician is found in the little book *None of These Diseases*, by S.I. McMillan.¹² Both in McMillan’s 1963 edition and in the 2000 edition revised by his physician grandson, David Stern, the same thesis predominates: The Mosaic laws on health give us life-saving knowledge. If Israel would obey, “none of these diseases” with which God had afflicted the Egyptians would come upon Israel (Ex. 15:26).

Both editions open with vivid illustrations from *Papyrus Ebers*, an Egyptian medical book from 1500 B.C. For example, chapter 1 in the revised edition opens with this quote: “To cure pinkeye apply the urine of a faithful wife.”¹³ But instead of seeing Israel’s laws as steps toward a better way, McMillan and Stern want to see them as absolute laws valid for all time. Thus the 2000 edition, reiterating the logic of the first edition, says: “If Moses had yielded to his natural tendency to add even a little of his ‘higher education,’ the Bible would contain such prescriptions as ‘urine of a faithful wife’ or ‘blood of a worm.’ ... Moses recorded hundreds of health regulations but not a single current medical misconception.”¹⁴

But wait a minute. *None of These Diseases* doesn’t mention the troublesome exceptions. What about the prohibition against eating an animal that dies of itself—yet with permission to give it to a resident alien or to sell it to foreigners (Deut. 14:21)? And what about the law that lays out the procedure for determining the guilt or innocence of an accused wife? It said to scrape up some dust from the sanctuary floor and put it in water for the accused wife to drink. If she miscarries, she is guilty; if nothing happens, she is innocent (Num. 5:11-31).

We can applaud McMillan and Stern for seeing the positive value of law. But isn’t it possible to say that some of the laws no longer apply in our day? I think so. Adventists can affirm that the Bible is indeed a guide for the present, but a guide that illustrates partial steps along the way to full truth in Jesus.

3. Hope for the future, refined by the Great Disappointment. Adventism was born at a time of high optimism among Christians: The world seemed to be getting better and better, and many looked for a thousand years of peace on Earth. The Millerites countered all that, declaring that a deteriorating world would soon be destroyed at Christ’s second coming.

Modern Adventists affirm that the Millerites were right in seeing a world headed for destruction but were wrong in setting dates. As the century moved toward its end, however, a variant of the Adventist conviction of a world in decline began

to spread rapidly among devout believers. Popularized in the early 20th century by the Scofield Reference Bible (1909, 1917) and in the 21st century by the *Left Behind* books and movies (1997-2007), dispensational futurists are premillennialists like Adventists, believing that the second coming of Jesus and the great resurrection of the dead take place *before* the thousand years. In recent years, “progressive dispensationalism” has articulated some marked changes, especially with reference to the biblical understanding of law and grace.¹⁵ But the eschatology of dispensationalism remains essentially the same.

With reference to the end of time, Adventists part company with classical dispensational futurism in five important ways:

1. **Law:** Adventists believe that the Decalogue is enduring; futurists see it as effective only between Sinai and the cross of Calvary, then again during the thousand years on Earth.
2. **Prophecy:** Adventists believe in conditionalism; the story of Jonah provides a good example of when God “changed his mind” (Jonah 3:10, NRSV) or “repented” (KJV) when people changed. Futurists believe in fixed prophecy: any unfulfilled prophecy to Israel will be fulfilled during the thousand years.
3. **Restoration of the sanctuary:** Adventists believe in the restoration of a heavenly sanctuary; futurists look for a rebuilt earthly sanctuary in Jerusalem on the site of the Muslim mosque, Dome of the Rock.
4. **Messiah and the 70 weeks:** Adventists believe the “anointed” one in Daniel 9 points to the work of Jesus the Messiah; futurists do not apply Daniel 9 to the Messiah at all.
5. **Millennium:** Adventists believe the thousand years of Revelation 20 will be spent away from Earth; futurists believe that the thousand years are spent on Earth, where all the unfulfilled elements of all Old Testament prophecies will be realized in detail. Thus, on the basis of Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14, they see death, childbirth, and animal sacrifice during the thousand years, even though they are evangelical Christians who believe in the completed atonement on the cross.

What made the difference? To be sure, a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is a key factor in holding dispensationalism in place. But for Adventists, the Great Disappointment of 1844 looms large. The Millerites had been shattered, but as they began putting the pieces back together, they didn’t necessarily follow the pattern marked out by other Christians. As the “waiting” time continued after 1844, some Christians began making fun of Adventists for their belief in a soon-coming Savior. Ellen White finally addressed that criticism, but in an intriguing manner, for her defense is found in a manuscript written in 1883 but not published until 1958.¹⁶ In fact, the manuscript is an orphan in

the White Estate files. There is no record that it was ever sent to anyone, and Ellen White did not cite the crucial passages while she was alive. But several points are worth noting, especially this striking quote: “The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.”¹⁷

Perhaps even more remarkable is Ellen White’s use of Scripture to make her point, citing four New Testament texts (1 Cor. 7:29-30; Rom. 13:12; Rev. 1:3; 22:6-7) to show that the New Testament writers also expected Jesus to come soon—that is, within the first century. This Ellen White quotation also played a key part in a hugely significant but often overlooked article titled “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy.”¹⁸ The article argues that God’s original plan for Israel would have been fulfilled had Israel been faithful. The Messiah would have given his life, but he would have been accepted by his people. In short, this article incorporates all of those passages from Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14, which futurists move into the millennium, into an end-time scenario quite different from that presented by the New Testament.

Without the Great Disappointment, Adventists might never have learned about conditionalism, and we might have been much closer to the futurists than we now are. Furthermore, conditionalism reinforces a central New Testament teaching: We must always be ready, because we don’t know when the Lord is coming.¹⁹ That point is made with clarity in an essay by C.S. Lewis titled “The World’s Last Night.”²⁰ He writes: “We must never speak to simple, excitable people about ‘the day’ without emphasizing again and again the utter impossibility of prediction. We must try to show them that the impossibility is an essential part of the doctrine. If you do not believe our Lord’s words, why do you believe in his return at all? And if you do believe them must you not put away from you, utterly and forever, any hope of dating that return? His teaching on the subject quite clearly consisted of three propositions. (1) That he will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore we must always be ready for him.”²¹

And so it is that my Adventist heritage enables me to understand the past, to live in the present, and to hope for the future, waiting with patience for Jesus’ return. I believe he could return at any moment, but by God’s grace, I will occupy until he comes. And that means working my heart out with my fellow believers to make this world as much like that new one as it is

possible for sinful human beings to do.

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- ¹ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), pp. 81-82.
² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. vi.
³ White, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1913), p. 432.
⁴ *ibid.*, p. 433.
⁵ See especially chapters 7 and 8 in my book *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), pp. 98-136.
⁶ White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1892, 1958), p. 37.
⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1875), p. 420.
⁸ The 1892 quote is found in *Steps to Christ*, p. 14. It is repeated in *The Desire of Ages* (1898), pp. 483-484. The most accessible source for the 1854 quote is *Early Writings* (1882), pp. 127, 151. But its first appearance was in *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (1854), p. 48. It appeared again in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1 (1858), p. 26 and in *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 1 (1870), p. 48. The 1882 edition of *Early Writings* simply reproduced all of those earlier sources. The White Estate preface to the fourth edition of *Early Writings* (1945) indicates that minor editing changes have been made but assures the reader: "No shadow of change has been made in any idea or sentiment of the original work, and the verbal changes have been made under the author's own eye, and with her full approval" (p. iii). Remarkably, the early quote is also found in *The Story of Redemption* (1947), p. 45, more than 50 years after the buoyant later quote first appeared in *Steps to Christ* (1892). The foreword to *The Story of Redemption* is revealing, noting that the 3,500 pages of the five-volume *Conflict of the Ages* series has done a "marvelous" work of bringing the story of God's great plan of redemption to the world. Publication of this book was a response to the felt need in America and abroad for a concise account of God's plan of redemption. What is even more remarkable, however, is that this "concise" account is not drawn from the *Conflict of the Ages* series, but from the earlier accounts. According to the sources listed in the table of contents, only one later source is used: a *Signs of the Times* article from 1904 on the life of Paul (cf. *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 310-314). In the book itself, "the deletions necessary to present this story in a minimum of space are not indicated in the text." Vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and grammar have all been brought up to date, but "aside from these adjustments, the original text is unchanged, still maintaining its original graphic and terse treatment of the vital theme it presents." Obviously the compilers were not aware of the dramatic differences between the "early" and "late" Ellen White. Thus, through this one volume, the story of a God reluctant to save, rather than a God eager to save, has been spread abroad to the world and has been translated into many languages.
⁹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 641.
¹⁰ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, third series (1889), *The Truth*: #198, "Grace and Freedom," from *George MacDonald: 365 Readings*, edited and with a preface by C.S. Lewis (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 86.
¹¹ White, *The Great Controversy*, 1911, p. 678.
¹² S.I. McMillen graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and the London School of Tropical Medicine and served as a missionary in Africa for many years. He returned to establish a medical practice in New York. First published in 1963 by Fleming H. Revell, an updated version of *None of These Diseases* was published in 2000, a revision prepared by Dr. McMillen's grandson, David Stern, also a physician. The book is still in print as of this writing.
¹³ S.I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases*, edited by David E. Stern (Grand Rapids: Revell/Baker, 2000), p. 9.
¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11.
¹⁵ See Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton, IL:

Bridgepoint/Victor, 1993).

¹⁶ See Manuscript 4, 1883 (published in full in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 59-73).

¹⁷ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 67.

¹⁸ "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4: *Isaiah to Malachi*, edited by Francis D. Nichol (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1955), pp. 25-38.

¹⁹ See especially Matthew 24-25 and 1 Thess. 5:1-11.

²⁰ Lewis, "The World's Last Night" (1952) in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1987).

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 107.

"OCCUPY TILL I COME"

Relevance of Belief in the Hope of the Coming of God

BY ZDRAVKO PLANTAK

"But about that day and hour [of the second coming] no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt. 24:36, NRSV), said Jesus in his most explicit Olivetti sermon. It was a painful and embarrassing moment for our church pioneers in the mid-19th century after their date settings, and it should not be even slightly speculated by the more contemporary church. The question of the timing of the final coming of Jesus is not and should really not be our primary concern. What seems to be seriously lacking in the history of the church is interest in the liminal space, or that space between the first and the second coming of Jesus while we are on the threshold of the kingdom of glory while we have already entered the kingdom of grace,¹ the place of transition between the promise and the fulfillment. This is the space that we inhabit today, and the most important question that our situation as Advent believers raises is what it means: to "occupy" till our Lord comes (Luke 19:13, KJV) and takes us to our "new earth" dwellings (Rev. 21:1-4, KJV).

It would be deeply presumptuous, somewhat arrogant, and considerably suspect to think that God depends on us to finish the work in order for him to return to the Earth to complete the final stage of the plan of salvation. If God planned the various dates predicted in the Jewish Scriptures—such as the exact time of the birth of the Messiah, and the ending dates for the

domination of the world empires expressed through the pen of Daniel—would he leave dependent and uncertain the dates of his second coming in the hands of “the little flock” of people at the end time? Nobody knows the time or the hour of Christ’s coming but God himself (Matt. 24:36), the lesson that our forefathers had to learn the hard way through the Great Disappointment and bitter embarrassment in the 1840s. We should remember this and never put a limit or obstacle on God’s perfect timing of the second coming, which was determined long before our church’s existence and is not dependent on the obstruction—including our own work as a body of Christ in the world today in sharing the amazing news of God’s rich grace that calls us to him to be his people. Our motivation should not be to hasten the coming of the Lord to take us to the prepared places of our future dwelling, but to enact and implement what we hope to see in the kingdom of God, of which we have already entered the first stage (the kingdom of grace) and of which we can see the glimpses of the final stage (the kingdom of glory) that we anticipate in a “near” future. It is in this liminal time, at the threshold, in the doorways, embracing the time between now and not yet in which we are called to harmonize Christlikeness² in the way we treat the marginalized—the widow, the orphan, and the alien at the

Until not long ago, only religious people talked about the “end of the world.” More recently it has become a concern of many thinking people. Today, more than ever, one can see the lively relevance of Christian eschatology and especially its crown, the second coming of Christ. Christian eschatology speaks directly to the present, as one observes such phenomena of the modern world as the possibility of nuclear self-destruction, or the real possibility of environmental disaster, or the prospects of overpopulation and starving to death or poisoning ourselves with pollution. As one Adventist commented: “The doctrine of last things doesn’t deal with the far-off future. It speaks to the present. It is as timely as the morning paper and the hourly newscast.”³

Although in the traditional arrangement of Christian theology the doctrine of the second coming comes at the end, it is not an afterthought. Instead, the second coming becomes the climax to which all the rest leads, “the ringing conclusion of all that Christians have to say.”⁴ Many biblical scholars hold that eschatology applies not only to part of what Christians believe, but to all of it. John A.T. Robinson, a well-known British theologian, suggests that “all statements about the End ... are fundamentally affirmations about God, [and] every statement about God is ipso facto an assertion about the end, a truth about

MISTAKENLY, ADVENTIST EMPHASIS ON RECKONING THE POSSIBLE TIME OF CHRIST’S COMING (THE PROMINENT PHRASE “IN OUR LIFETIME” STANDS OUT) LED GENERATION AFTER GENERATION OF BELIEVERS INTO DISAPPOINTMENT AT NOT YET SEEING THEIR LORD.

gate, or their 21st-century equivalents: the women who still have less rights than the men, the children who slave in sweatshops so we can enjoy cheap Western consumerism, the foreigners to whom we deny access to “good life,” the poor around the world who have no economic means to survive—let alone to thrive—and flourish with the common good of what God has given in his generosity in the bounty of the earth, the earth that we abuse for our selfish benefits instead of giving it sabbatical rest when it is needed, and the homosexuals and other marginalized groups who receive the hatred and sting of our phobias and our condemnations. After all, we have been asked to be the good stewards, to be the body of which Christ is the head, and, above all, to occupy till he comes.

eschatology.”⁵ Adventist theologian Richard Rice suggests that the second coming, in addition to being a part of the process of human history, actually became the climax of it. “Christian faith interprets human history as a whole, not just its final segment. It views all of history in the light of God’s saving activity, and it sees the end of history as the climax of the process.”⁶

Two Potential Negative Effects

Overexcitement. The effects of the belief in the second advent are important in the context of the study of social ethics. As Adventist scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi pointed out, two dangers exist in living the advent hope: overexcitement and indifference. “There have been Christians in every age who became so excited at the

thought of Christ's imminent Coming that they gave up all efforts to work for their personal future or for that of the society in which they lived."⁷ Our early church pioneers were accused of the same attitude. For example, Joseph Bates, a prominent abolitionist before accepting the advent message, was accused of abandoning this worldly activism due to his belief in the second advent, to which he replied that indeed "in embracing the doctrine of the second coming of the Saviour, I found enough to engage my whole time in getting ready for such an event, and aiding others to do the same."⁸

Bacchiocchi illustrated it with a simile of the sinking ship: "[Some Christians today] view the present world as a sinking ship and so they see no value in setting the course, polishing the brass or mending the sails. Rather than working on the ship,

Christian to wash his hands of it. On this view, the salvation is salvation of the soul alone. No serious attempt is made to consider the soul's environment."¹¹

Indifference. Another danger to which Christians who wait for Christ's imminent return are exposed is indifference. In Bacchiocchi's opinion the vast majority of Christians have become neglectful, even indifferent toward Christ's coming. They have made the present world the ultimate reality to live and work for. "For these," Bacchiocchi continued, "the present world is not a waiting room to the world to come, but a living room in which to live as comfortably and as relaxed as possible."¹²

Kubo used the idea of the "problem of delay," a prominent theme in modern Adventism, to explain how the prolonged

THE CHRISTIAN KNOWS THAT HIS SERVICE TO CHRIST IS EXPRESSED IN THE PERSON OF THE POOR, THE PRISONER, THE DISADVANTAGED, NEEDY, MISERABLE, AND MARGINALIZED OF ALL KINDS.

they spend their time on lifeboats, warning from a distance the passengers on the ship of its impending doom. They regard any attempt to improve social conditions as futile and unnecessary, since Christ at His Coming will destroy the present sinful world-order."⁹

Adventist author and retired educator Sakae Kubo, when expressing the charge that is made against a believer in the second coming, put it somewhat similarly: "the person who really believes in the second coming of Christ and the end of our world is not alert to and cannot have any concern about improving human social conditions. He is so otherworldly that he loses all sense of involvement in our world. Wrapped up only in his own individual salvation, he feels nothing for his neighbor and his plight."¹⁰

This charge of isolationism and noninvolvement was exposed head-on by non-Adventist theologian Max Warren when he said that: "The real reason for the failure of Second Adventism to win support lies in the fact that it affronts the moral conscience of the Church by its virtual abandonment of responsibility for the things of this world in deference to its preoccupation with the imminent return of the Lord and the end of history. Human life, insofar as it is involved in the life of Society, is held to lie so completely in 'the evil one' that the only safe action is for the

delay between the proclamation of the "soon" second coming and parousia can affect the advent believers. On one side, crying "wolf" too many times "can lead to a complete lack of response," argued Kubo. The opposite extreme of this reasoning, however, "concludes that if one does not expect an impending return, he can relax and live a careless Christian life." He concluded: "The latter kind of reasoning controlled the servant who said to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and began 'to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk' (Luke 12:45); and this relaxing is a real danger to those taught that only a sense of Christ's immediate return can instill the urgency necessary for a fervent Christian life."¹³

It is, therefore, neither the timing nor the sequence of the second coming that should motivate the Christian to moral behavior but, instead, the certainty of Christ's coming.¹⁴

It is interesting to notice that motivation for ethical behavior, in the context of the servant of Luke 12, was the coming of the Lord. So, contrary to the opinion that the second coming is a brake to Christian social involvement, it is rightly portrayed in Luke 12 as the motivating factor. Nevertheless, it is obvious from Christ's parable that the imminence of the second coming should not be the only motivating factor in Christian ethics.

Bacchiocchi rightly called for balance between the two

extremes of practical living of the advent hope. To be an “adventist,” a Christian who lives in the expectancy of Christ’s coming, “means to avoid both the overexcitement which writes off the present world as doomed, and the indifference which makes the present world the ultimate reality for which to live and work. It means ‘to live sober, upright and godly lives’ (Titus 2:12), maintaining the delicate balance between being concretely involved in the salvation of this world, and not becoming so entangled in its affairs as to lose sight of the world to come.”¹⁵

Positive Effects of Certainty

The need for exploring the meaning of the doctrine of the second coming, especially in relationship to the Adventist social ethic, was met most eloquently by Sakae Kubo. He addressed a number of aspects of the doctrine of the second coming that we would do well to examine. Jesus’ return is guaranteed by his death, resurrection, and ascension. Since these are accomplished facts, his coming is an absolute certainty.¹⁶ Kubo used Dutch theologian G.C. Berkouwer’s sentence, “The believer is called to an attitude that does not reckon but constantly reckons with the coming of the Lord,”¹⁷ to establish the importance of the Lord’s return.

Mistakenly, Adventist emphasis on reckoning the possible time of Christ’s coming (the prominent phrase “in our lifetime” stands out) led generation after generation of believers into disappointment at not yet seeing their Lord. However, the most important factor of the second coming need not be the imminence of Christ’s return but its reality in our own experience. After all, Kubo suggested, “The instant of [a person’s] death is in effect for him the moment of Christ’s coming. Thus in a real sense, Christ returns for everyone in his lifetime. The urgency of Christian living must center around that point. The actual time of Christ’s coming is not significant—only the fact of it.”¹⁸

The effect this kind of understanding of the second coming would have on a believer is inescapable. Even if the Lord returns in “our” time, as generations of Adventists have believed, this may be seven or seventy years. There is no room for complacency. The imminence of Christ’s second advent is in such a case a reality in every period of the church’s history, from the time of the apostles to the present.

If Christians connect the actual second coming with “the necessity to give more generously and to live more fervently”—in other words, to be concerned for their fellow human beings because of the nearness of the Advent—they will create the impression that only if they feel its approach need they show concern to live urgently. And this was a trap that the servant in Luke 12 fell into. By implication it would mean that if Jesus’

coming is not soon, “we are justified in living less fervently, less urgently, perhaps even carelessly. In fact, that was the attitude of the servant who, because he felt that his master was delaying, began to beat his workers, to eat and drink and get drunk. But whether Christ’s coming is a thousand years from now should not make one iota of difference in the way we live. That He will come should provide sufficient motive for a dedicated Christian life.”¹⁹

The Future Determines the Present

While Rice argued that the hope in the second coming sees the future in direct relation to the present,²⁰ to the point of the future actually impinging on the present, threatening to break in at any time, Kubo went beyond this understanding in suggesting that the future actually determines the present and the past. He argued that “before the incarnation of Christ, one’s past determined the future and present.”²¹ In Adam all die (1 Cor. 15:22) was the judgment on all apart from Christ. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NRSV), the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans. And since sin was our past and is our present in salvation history, it determined our future: death (Rom. 5:12). However, the Christ event reversed the whole process.

The future does not only impinge on the present, or threaten to break in, but it enters the present and affects it, Kubo argued. “Eternal life, the Holy Spirit, and justification we experience now, yet they are of the age to come. The ultimate certainty of the future blessings effected through the coming of the second Adam makes it possible to bring the future into the present.”²²

The future, for some Christians, indeed becomes the proverbial opium of the masses. They falsely think of the parousia as a compensation for their various lacks in the present life. Hope becomes, in such reasoning, only a wish projection of the deprived. The second coming, and what it will bring, becomes mere wishful thinking—a hope that is but a compensation for what people do not or cannot have here and now.

However, the parousia is not “the promise of what we need or would like, but a fulfillment of what we even now experience.” Kubo reasoned: “And those who look to Christian hope as a compensation have a fragile hope because it depends on human circumstances. ... We grow beyond such hope when we become better educated and better employed. Our earthly mansions can take the place of the heavenly, our Cadillacs for the heavenly chariots, our stylish wardrobes for the white robe of righteousness, our table delicacies for the tree of life. Because so many Christians view hope in such manner, their hope diminishes as their bank account increases.”²³

On the other hand, Christians should not long for the parousia

to the extent of forgetting the present. The parousia must not be a compensation, but a consummation. In the words of Anglican Bishop Joseph Fison: “Present presence and future parousia do not disappear or coalesce in a timeless eternity. They are two inseparable but irreducible elements in that single reality of love, of which the more you have in the present the more you know awaits you in the future.”²⁴

Fison pointed out that “Without faith in the real presence, belief in the real parousia ... is phantasy: without faith in the real parousia, belief in the real presence is idolatry.”²⁵ The present hope, although not identical with the future realization, is nevertheless closely related. The parousia is the fulfillment of the present experience. Swiss Protestant theologian Emil Brunner suggested that “the hope which springs from faith is so much a part of the life of faith that one must say: the future, for which it hopes, is the present in which the believer lives.”²⁶ And the consequences of such a view for daily moral living are obvious. If the believer lives out now the hope of the future, such hope will inevitably penetrate the sphere of human rights and how we ultimately treat one another. In other words, the justice and equality that the believer expects God to establish at the time of Christ’s coming must be the same justice and equality that encompass the present life of the believer.

Paradox of the Eschatological Motif

Christian apologist C.S. Lewis has been credited with the thought that “only since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world have they become so ineffective in this. The rule seems to be that if you aim at heaven, you get earth ‘thrown in.’ Aim at earth and you will get neither.”²⁷ Paradoxically, it is suggested, only a person who lives with a vision of the second coming can truly feel the concern for the present world. On the other hand, a person whose vision is limited to the present world cannot logically worry about love, right, justice, and truth—about others. American theologian and activist Robert McAfee Brown expressed it this way: “Among the New Testament Christians, the fact of the matter is that eschatology did not lead to irresponsibility or neglect of this world. On the contrary, their concern with the ‘age to come’ made them live more responsibly in the present age. This is the fact which can be documented.”²⁸

It is true that the first Christian church did not attempt to change the social order from the outside by revolution. Rather, it worked from within by conversion. But the changes of its influence were nevertheless far-reaching. Paul, for example, by spreading the good news about the God made without hands, touched the vested interests of the Artemis cult in Ephesus. By

freeing the slave girl with the spirit of divination, he challenged her and other owners of such girls, and by treating Onesimus in a new way, he dealt a mortal blow to businesses that depended on people’s ignorance (cf. Acts 19:23-41; Phil. 1:8-16). Finally, the yeast of the early Christian era worked its way to the point, even if only unintentionally, of the establishment of a Christian state.

Kubo summed up the paradox of the eschatological motif in social ethics in an illustration about the sinking ship: “Nevertheless, the decent person is one who, though he knows that he is on a floundering ship doomed to a watery burial, refuses simply to think of saving himself by secretly escaping alone on a lifeboat. He ministers to the needy and for the welfare of all concerned, even though he may well realize that no hope remains for any of them. The Christian cannot do any less, and paradoxically the eschatological motive with its implication that there exists a righteous loving God in control of all things intensifies his desire to act in the way of his Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself not only for His friends but for His enemies.”²⁹

The argument, therefore, that a believer expecting the coming of the Lord and believing that our present world will vanish has no interest in people, their rights, and their environment collapses. To the contrary, the believer with an insight of biblical eschatology knows that the God of love, justice, truth, and morality is in control of history. This motivates him to live all the more responsibly, upholding and promoting the human rights of all people.

Also, the certainty of the second coming of Christ helps the believer create the right perspective and balance in prioritizing his time and energy. The eschatological orientation helps him to see which things are really important. It brings priorities into the right focus. In expecting the end of the present age, some things become more vital than others. The life of the eschatological Christian must be dedicated to God in service for others. Just as in the parable of the sheep and the goat, which occurs in the context of the discourse on the second coming (Matthew 24 and 25), the Christian knows that his service to Christ is expressed in the person of the poor, the prisoner, the disadvantaged, needy, miserable, and marginalized of all kinds.

Eschatology—an Additional Motif

Lastly, Christian social ethics does not rest directly and fundamentally on eschatology.³⁰ Godlikeness and the commandment of love are the basic warrants for social action. Jesus did not allow his predictions of the future to affect the content of his moral teaching. His teaching is directed toward the need of the neighbor and not toward the end of this age.

The story of the Good Samaritan, for example, lacks an eschatological motive. Jesus' command is simply, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37, NRSV). However, the eschatological motif is not entirely absent either. Although not as the primary reason, Kubo argued that "a kind of 'eschatological' motive for ethics appears in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21), i.e., that death can overtake us by surprise."³¹ Although the eschatological factor is rarely the primary reason for social ethics, it is nevertheless given on occasions as an additional motif. The significant factor in the discussion of the theology of the second coming, especially in the context of social ethics, is that "the eschatological motive is not an excuse to be unconcerned with ethics but an additional basis to be intensely more so."³² In other words, the second coming need not be an obstacle for the involvement in human rights but should become, although not necessarily the primary, at least an additional incentive for moral life in society and being concerned for justice, equality, and peacemaking.

Mercy to the Marginalized

The teaching of the return of Jesus for the second time is not about the timing, whether it be in the 19th, 20th, or even 21st centuries. As the one who is actually returning clearly stated, no one knows the hour nor the day (Matt. 25:13), and therefore, by proxy, no one knows the century either. What is at stake is the certainty of the return. We must decide on the most appropriate ways to occupy the time between the first and the second comings. Living in between the two events, occupying the threshold in the most appropriate posture, embracing the liminality of space and time between Jesus' first and the last appearing. This is clear in the way Jesus completed his "signs of the times" sermon recorded in Matthew 24 and 25. He warns of not knowing the time of the coming and then gives three illustrations of the "occupy movement"—those who are utilizing the talents and multiplying them in his service, those who are faithfully prepared to wait even when the bridegroom seems to be late, and especially those who throw themselves into full ministry to the marginalized of the world and do acts of mercy and love that seem to Jesus to be acts directed toward him, who identified with the "least of these" (Matt. 25:40, 45, NRSV). At the end of the second coming sermon of Jesus, the question lingers ... not of when will he return, but what have we have done (or worse, not have done) with the most vulnerable and most marginalized in our society?

"Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (verses 45-46, NRSV).

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¹ Ellen G. White was very creative about the two aspects of the kingdom of God and generated these two distinct aspects of the kingdom of now and not yet: the kingdom of grace that Jesus already established, and the kingdom of glory that is yet to be fully realized at the future advent of Christ. See her book *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), pp. 347-348. For further discussion on this significant point, including non-Adventist theological debates on the Kingdom of God in the 19th century and the Adventist theological heritage of this discussion in the 20th century, see Zdravko Plantak, *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's/Palgrave, 1998), pp. 168-186.

² Cruciformity, a form of sanctification that has been emphasized in Orthodox theology as deification or theosis, has been embraced in recent decades as cruciformity in Protestant circles. See especially Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) and Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

³ Richard Rice, *Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology From a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 311.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ John A.T. Robinson, *In the End God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 22, 47.

⁶ Rice, p. 312.

⁷ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness: A Theological Study of the Meaning of the Second Coming for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1986), p. 398.

⁸ Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), p. 262; and *The Life of Joseph Bates: An Autobiography* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1927), p. 186. See also Plantak, pp. 11-13.

⁹ Bacchiocchi, p. 399.

¹⁰ Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man: A Theology of the Sabbath and the Second Advent* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1978), p. 105.

¹¹ Max Warren, *The Truth of Vision: A Study in the Nature of the Christian Hope* (London and Edinburgh: The Canterbury Press, 1948), p. 53.

¹² Bacchiocchi, p. 399.

¹³ Kubo, p. 98.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 99. cf. Rice, p. 312.

¹⁵ Bacchiocchi, pp. 399-400.

¹⁶ See Kubo, pp. 97-104.

¹⁷ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 84.

¹⁸ Kubo, pp. 102-103.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁰ Rice, p. 346.

²¹ Kubo, p. 91.

²² *ibid.*, p. 92.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁴ J.E. Fison, *The Christian Hope: The Presence and the Parousia* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1954), p. 221.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁶ Emil H. Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, translated by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), p. 30.

²⁷ C.S. Lewis as quoted in Colin Morris, *The Hammer of the Lord* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), pp. 137-138.

²⁸ Robert McAfee Brown, "'Eschatological Hope' and Social Responsibility," *Christianity and Crisis*, Nov. 16, 1953, p. 147.

²⁹ Kubo, p. 108.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 106-111.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 107.

³² *ibid.*



Need Not Be a Preacher, Must Not Be a Policy Man

By Alden Thompson

The undated pages are beginning to yellow. But the memories are vivid. When a colleague mentioned that Ellen White's *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* had turned him from pre-med to ministry, I decided to read it. The pages now turning yellow are the ones on which I took copious notes.

If you're angry with the church—as I was then—*Testimonies to Ministers* offers a choice supply of grenades to toss at the brethren. Most of the strong quotes originated from Australia, where the brethren had banished Ellen White to get her out of their hair. But her pen stayed alive. As I read, I found myself chortling again and again, “Hit ‘em harder, Sister White!”

Then, to my horror, I sensed that my anger was suffocating me. So for quite selfish reasons, I had to turn 180 degrees, focusing on Thompson, not the brethren. I still believe that when Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, his first concern was not for the enemies...

Crucial and Striking Words

But enough setting. Let's turn to substance. Ellen White's counsel is well worth pondering as we consider how the church can best meet the needs of our troubled world today. Normally in this column I try to avoid block quotations, since they are too easy to skip. But the ones in this article are so crucial and striking that I want the reader to see the full context. So here is the 1896 paragraph that contributed the title to this column:

“In each country a man should be appointed to work in the general interests of the cause. He need not be a preacher, and he must not be a policy man. He should be unselfish, a man who loves, who honors, and fears his God. His whole time should be devoted to the work. He should plan unselfishly, and in the fear of God. Let him be general agent for that country, and let him be connected with a council composed of the very best men, that they may counsel together, and attend to the work within their borders. There should be businessmen appointed to do the same in the different states in America.”¹

Why the fuss about conference presidents needing to be ordained? In Ellen White's view, “businessmen” could do the job. And the leader “need not be a preacher, and he must not be a policy man.” Case closed—if you take Ellen White seriously.

Another quotation, this one from 1895, is at least as forceful:

“I could not entrust the light God has given me to the publishing house at Battle Creek. I would not dare to do this. As for your book committee, under the present administration, with the men who now preside, I would not entrust to them for publication in books the light given me of God, until that publishing house has men of consecrated ability and wisdom. As for the voice of the General Conference, there is no voice from God through that body that is reliable.”²

It is understandable that “official” church sources almost never publish the anti-General Conference statements from Ellen White. Angry Adventist fundamentalists grab such quotations and use them to buttress their claim that the General Conference has fallen from grace forever.³ Ellen White vigorously opposed that tendency, even in a letter to her own son Edson, calling him to account for his actions following the 1901 General Conference:

“Your course would have been the course to be pursued if no change had been made in the General Conference. *But a change has been made*, and many more changes will be made and great developments will be seen. No issues are to be forced. It hurts me to think that you are using words which I wrote prior to the Conference. Since the Conference, great changes have been made.”⁴

Holding Leaders Accountable

So how can we address church leaders whose actions seem to fly in the face of Ellen White's counsel? A good place to start is with the two clear-cut goals that Elder Ted N.C. Wilson urged Adventists to adopt shortly after he was elected General Conference president: (1) Give Ellen White more than devotional authority; and (2) Hold church leaders accountable.

Hearty amens all round. But that's easier said than done in an organization that has proven vulnerable to authoritarian impulses. Attempting to hold leaders accountable could cost you your job. That's often why business leaders call in a consultant. It's easier to hear a corrective from a consultant than from a subordinate within the organization.

So let's call in a consultant, the cult expert Walter Martin. Though deceased, Martin left a good paper trail. He was heavily involved in the discussions between Evangelicals and Adventists

that led to the publication of the 1957 Adventist book *Questions on Doctrine* and Martin's own 1960 response, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*.⁵ I view Martin as one of the most honest and straightforward of the evangelical "cult" experts. In the QoD discussions, a primary concern was the relationship between Adventists and other Christians. Evangelicals have viewed Adventists as being very critical of other Christians, refusing to cooperate with them and holding themselves aloof. Because Martin held tenaciously to inerrancy, it was more difficult for him to be honest with Scripture. But since he did not consider Ellen White to be "inspired" (in the technical sense), he could

Bible From Heaven, even stealing Hull's title for his own book published in 1878. Martin reproduces parallel columns to prove it. His conclusion is worth noting:

D.M. Canright's plagiarism does not, of course, excuse Mrs. White's. Far from it! But it is an interesting parallel, especially since Canright is the wellspring of the charge of plagiarism which is still raised against Mrs. White.⁸

From Confrontation to Cooperation

When I first began to grapple with the contrasts between the early and late Ellen White⁹, I was especially interested in seeing how

Attempting to hold leaders accountable could cost you your job. That's often why business leaders call in a consultant. It's easier to hear a corrective from a consultant than from a subordinate within the organization.

be more honest with her than can those Adventists who do consider her to be "inspired" but who hold to inerrancy.

Martin was both brave and thorough, reading "almost all of the writings of Ellen G. White, including her *Testimonies*," concluding "that Mrs. White was truly a regenerate Christian woman who loved the Lord Jesus Christ and dedicated herself unstintingly to the task of bearing witness for Him as she felt led."⁶ He rejected the plagiarism-for-profit argument: "Careful reading of the life and the works of Ellen G. White," he wrote, "convinces me that she did not intend to plagiarize for profit."⁷ He argues that Ellen White did indeed plagiarize, though not for profit. I think he's right. But Martin notes rather wryly that D.M. Canright, one of her strongest contemporary critics in that respect, boldly plagiarized Moses Hull's 1863 book, *The*

she personally made the transition from confrontation—as in "Babylon is fallen" (Rev. 14:8) and "Come out of her my people!" (Rev. 18:4)—to cooperation, a stance illustrated most clearly by this 1887 counsel to Elder Boyd as he was departing for Africa:

"In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time

enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus.”¹⁰

As a devout and conscientious conservative, I needed to know how Ellen White made that transition. And as an outside consultant, Martin makes an interesting witness. Under the heading of “Ellen G. White on Interdenominational Fellowship,” Martin takes four pages in his book¹¹ to document this claim: “No informed student of Adventism can deny that Mrs. White herself, as well as other prominent leaders, in the early days of the movement encouraged the divisive attitude that Mrs. White, at least, openly deplored during the last three decades of her life.”¹²

He then lists 12 explicit Ellen White quotations that call for closer cooperation with other Christians. But note the qualification: “during the last three decades of her life.” Because Martin does not see Ellen White as being inspired, he has no difficulty in contrasting her early and late attitudes. Adventists bound by “inerrancy” find it very difficult to see that contrast.

After listing the 12 quotes, Martin offers this notable critique: “These quotations, from the highest authority outside the Bible where Seventh-day Adventism is concerned, show that Adventists as a denomination have largely ignored what they themselves consider to be the inspired counsel of Mrs. White in this specific area. Although much progress has been made in recent years, some of the earlier attitudes still persist, and until they are corrected in line with Mrs. White’s counsel to the Adventist church, they will doubtless present difficulties and obstacles to fellowship between Adventists and Christians of other denominations.”¹³

So where do we go from here? Read, discuss, pray. And as much as possible, we should seek conversations with those who seem to have strayed from the clear teachings of Jesus and the wise counsel of Ellen White. In particular, Ellen White’s counsel to G.I. Butler on his relations to A.T. Jones is a wonderful ideal:

“If a brother differs with you on some points of truth, do not stoop to ridicule, do not place him in a false light or misconstrue his words, making sport of them; do not misinterpret his words and wrest them of their true meaning. This is not conscientious argument. Do not present him before others as a heretic, when you have not with him investigated his positions, taking the Scriptures text-by-text in the spirit of Christ to show him what is truth. You do not yourself really know the evidence he has for his faith, and you cannot clearly define your own position. Take your Bible, and in a kindly spirit

weigh every argument that he presents, and show him by the Scriptures if he is in error. When you do this without unkind feelings, you will do only that which is your duty and the duty of every minister of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

Ellen White is simply counseling Butler to follow Jesus’ second great command—a simple command, but one of the hardest in all Scripture to live out. If only the whole church could pray for the kind of revival and reformation that would lead us back to those challenging words of Jesus.

¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), pp. 321-22, originally from a letter written from Ellen White’s home at “Sunnyside,” Cooranbong, New South Wales, and published in *Special Testimonies to Ministers and Workers*, No. 8 (1897). The document from *Special Testimonies* is more complete than the citation in *Testimonies to Ministers*.

²White, Manuscript 57 (1895), published in *Manuscript Releases Volume 17* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 178.

³See www.sdaapostasy.org for the use of this quotation by a site whose sponsors despise the church but claim to love Ellen White.

⁴White, Letter 54 (1901), as cited in C.C. Crisler, *Organization: Its Character, Purpose, Place, and Development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1938), p. 174 (emphasis supplied by Crisler). Fragments of this letter from White to her son Edson were officially released by the White Estate in *Manuscript Releases Volume 3*, No. 174 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 205, under the heading: Materials for A.V. Olson Manuscript [*Thirteen Crisis Years*], a book that had been published nine years earlier in 1981.

⁵Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960).

⁶*ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷*ibid.*, p. 100.

⁸*ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹The most accessible source for seeing the evidence, my rationale, and my conclusions is in Alden Thompson, *Escape From the Flames: How Ellen White Grew From Fear to Joy and Helped Me Do It Too* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005). The earliest publication of the evidence that Ellen White “changed”—although I never used the word “change,” preferring the more gentle term “grow”—was in my Sinai-Golgotha series, published post-Desmond Ford in *Adventist Review*: Dec. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 1981; July 1, 1982; plus “Even the Investigative Judgment Can Be Good News,” *Westwind*, Walla Walla College Alumni Journal, Winter 1982, pp. 4-7, 11.

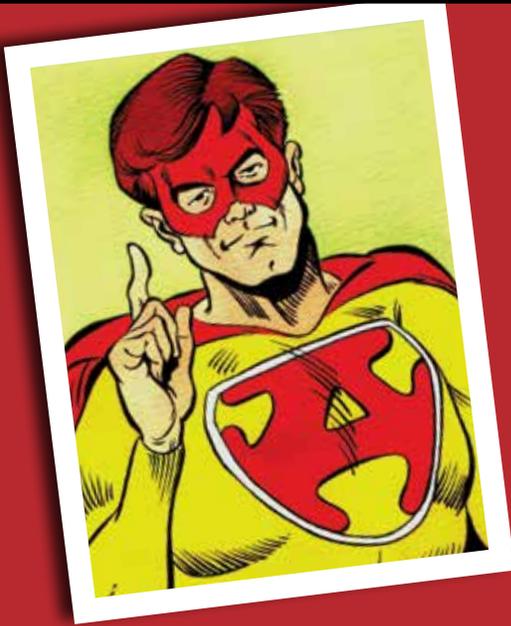
¹⁰White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1915), p. 119; *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), p. 200; cf. “Letter to a Minister and His Wife Bound for Africa,” Letter 12 to Elder Boyd, June 25, 1887, *Testimonies to Southern Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: South African Union Conference of SDA, 1997), p. 17, which is an almost verbatim “original” of the *Gospel Workers* quote.

¹¹Martin, pp. 43-46.

¹²*ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³*ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁴White, Letter 21 to Elder George I. Butler, October 14, 1888, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, with reference to his attitude toward A.T. Jones, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), p. 98; *Manuscript Releases Volume 12*, No. 998 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 376.



Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

The Banderspackle Model Constitution

As luck would have it (my aunt would say "Providence" rather than "luck," but I'm reserving judgment), Aunt Calista Banderspackle was visiting me in my garret room in the north tower of the *Adventist Today* building at the exact moment this column's assignment arrived.

Aunt Calista had just finished calling down fire from heaven on the soulless Scrooges (her words) who had confined me to such humble digs, and she had switched to her interior-decorating advisor mode when I heard the familiar squeak of the vertical clothesline pulley outside my window.

"What's that?" my aunt barked. "Something needs oiling."

"My editor is sending me an assignment from his office on the first floor," I replied. "The pulley isn't electronic, so it's totally secure, which is how he likes it." Opening the window, I unclthespinned a small note from the line.

"Give me that," growled Aunt Calista, who does not like to be interrupted while life-coaching. She snatched the note and unfolded it. "I need 700 words on the controversy over model constitutions," she read aloud.

"What's a model constitution?" I asked.

"I know where he's going with this," she huffed. "The General Conference would like every union to have a 'model constitution,' because then the unions have to slavishly follow everything the GC votes. But some unions won't play along."

"Okay," I said. "I'll write the column later."
"No you won't," she said. "I have some ideas about this." Aunt Calista can recite *Robert's Rules of Order* from memory and has even learned to repeat crucial chapters backward just in case. "Crank up that old laptop and take notes," she commanded, giving my 1990s Leading Edge a glare that would have melted the plastic on a less sturdy model.

"First off," she continued, "we're going to ignore all of the upper-echelon yimmer-yammer and start from the ground up. Even the lamest yahoo knows that the local congregation is where things happen. Conferences, unions, divisions, the GC—they're all just support systems. *Right?*"

"Right" is the only possible response to an aunt with .50-caliber eyes and a wrestler's build, so I murmured it and added, "What's your plan?"

"I am going to write a model constitution for the local church," she said. "And it's going to address all of the really important issues. Once local congregations get whipped into shape, everything else will fall into place."

"Fire away," I said, fingers over the keyboard, and Aunt Calista began to speak. After editing out the volcanic emotion that accompanied most of the following concepts, I can now hereby offer these initial ideas to church board chairpersons everywhere.

The Banderspackle Model Constitution

(Preliminary Thoughts)

Robocalls shall be made to church families early on Sabbath mornings so that everybody gets to Sabbath School on time.

Stun grenades shall be deployed among little knots of foyer greeters who insist on chatting with each other rather than welcoming visitors.

An illustrated guide to the latest high-five and fist-bump moves shall be provided to greeters so that all age groups may be appropriately welcomed.

Mule blinders shall be provided to greeters so that their eyes will remain on the faces of visitors whom they are welcoming, rather than rolling sideways to wink at passing friends.

AMBER Alert-style messages containing bulletin announcements shall be incessantly beamed across the screens of tablets, smartphones, and other devices belonging to attendees.

Low-power Tasers shall be issued to deacons to deal with male sermon-sleepers. ("Women do not sleep in church," states Calista Banderspackle.) A cord from a belt-mounted power supply shall be fed up the deacon's coat-sleeve and shall end in a palm-positioned shock unit. A single friendly shoulder-pat will instantly restore alertness to the most somnolent.

No lentil loaf made from a recipe older than a decade shall be allowed at potlucks. The loaf shall be judged with the use of the color cards found in the Banderspackle Scale of Food Grayness (available soon at your Adventist Book Center).

No meat-eating potluck guest shall be subjected to propaganda stating that homemade veggie burgers or sloppy joe mixtures or *faux* meatloaf casseroles are "just like" dishes containing real meat. They are not.

(Brace yourself for the entire Banderspackle Model Constitution, which will shortly be available in ABCs. Aunt Calista is on the warpath.)

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

YOUNG ADULTS FROM ADVENTIST FAMILIES

February Event Will Explore Stories of a New Generation

A panel of 20-somethings with childhood roots in the Adventist movement will share their diverse spiritual journeys on Sabbath, February 15, at 3 p.m. The event will focus on the topic most often requested by *Adventist Today* readers: Will the next generation be Adventist? How will they change the faith?

The event will be held in the Damazo Amphitheater in the Centennial Complex at Loma Linda University. It is cosponsored by the Adventist Today Foundation and the humanities program of the university's School of Religion. It will be open to any interested individual or group.

The speakers will include Alfredo Lee, Edgar Momplaisir, and Pastor Courtney Ray. A young adult ministry professional from the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been invited to respond to the three speakers. There will also be time for questions from the audience. Moderator for the panel will be Ryan Bell, a board member for the Adventist Today Foundation and former Adventist pastor currently working as a community organizer.

A recent research summit convened by the denomination's General Conference revealed that more than a third of the people baptized in the Adventist Church over the past 50 years later dropped out. Several surveys have shown that about half of the children raised in Adventist families have disconnected from the church by their mid-20s. The widely held idea that the Adventist dropout problem is largely related to recent converts has proved to be a myth. It seems to have a stronger correlation with "second-generation" church members.

The Adventist Today Foundation has organized this event not only to help Adventists gain a clearer understanding of intergenerational faith dynamics, but also to celebrate 20 years of publication of the independent news source. The first volume of the journal was published in 1993, and in 2013 the journal completed 20 volumes. It has grown into a multimedia operation with web, email and Facebook editions alongside the print magazine and book-publishing activities.

More information about the February 15 event will be released on the *Adventist Today* website. No pre-registration is required to attend the event. No attendance fee will be charged, although a freewill offering will be collected. Questions can be directed by email to atoday@atoday.org.

SPEAKERS

Alfredo Lee was born in Mexico to an Adventist family and moved to Los Angeles, sharing an immigrant experience common among his generation of Adventists. He served as a pianist every Sabbath for his father's congregations until he left home for college. He identifies himself as a mystic and a queer man of color, and he works for a child advocacy organization in Los Angeles.

Edgar Momplaisir is a writer and film director from Northern California. He was born into an Adventist family in New York City and attended Adventist schools for most of his life. He is expecting to graduate from Pacific Union College in June with a B.A. degree in Film and Television.

Pastor Courtney Ray was first introduced to the Adventist faith as a student in an Adventist school. She is associate pastor at the Tamarind Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in Compton, California. She completed an undergraduate pre-medicine program and later studied in the seminary at Andrews University. She has served as a pastor at Adventist churches in Baltimore, Maryland, and Hanford, California, as well as completing a master's degree in neuroscience and psychology at Loma Linda University.

