

The Ministry of
Christian Journalism

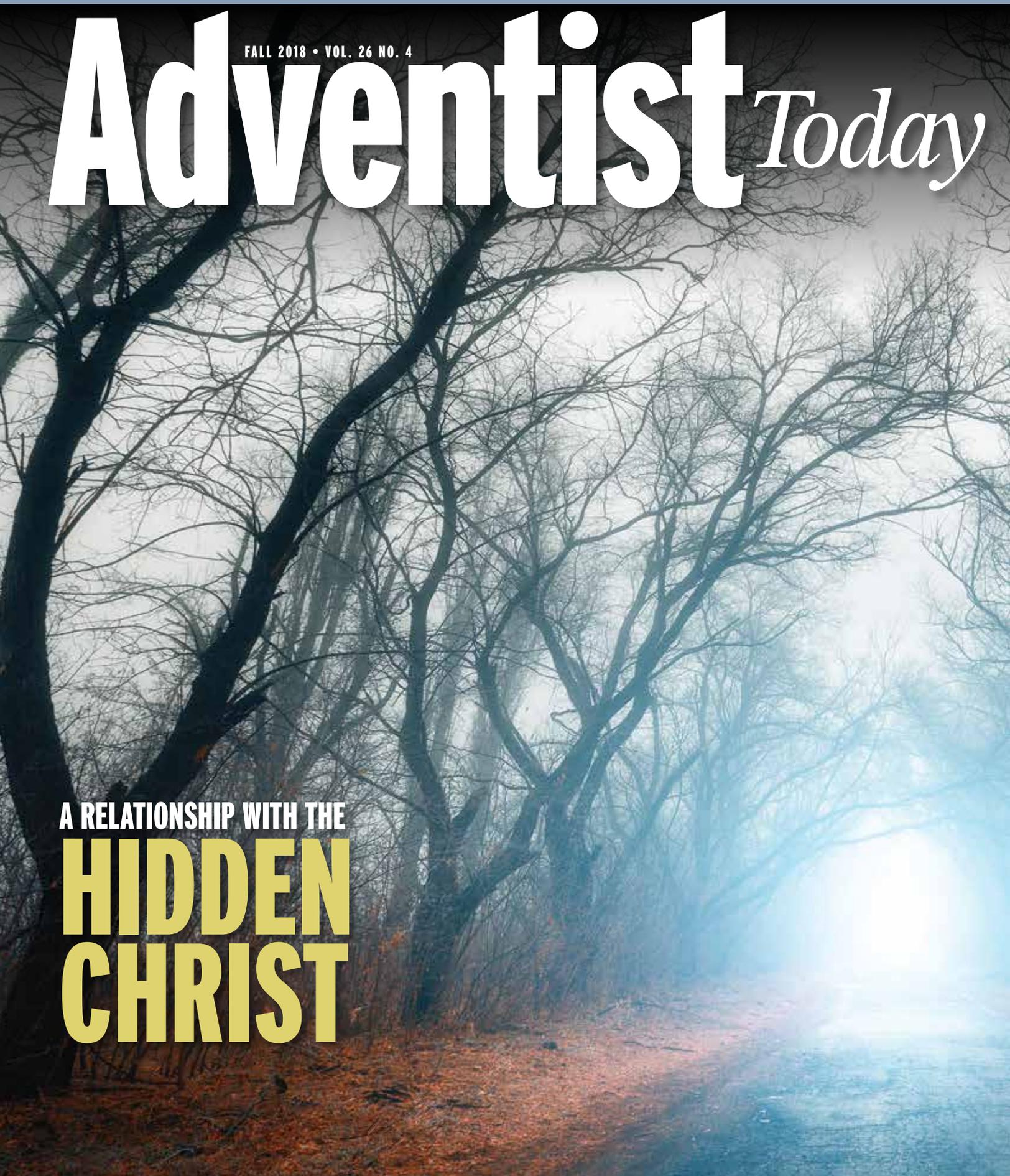
An Image to the
Roman Hierarchy

The Strange Spiritual
Journey of John Fetzer

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Adventist *Today*

A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE
**HIDDEN
CHRIST**





features

4 A Relationship with the Hidden Christ

By Smuts van Rooyen

8 An Image of the Roman Hierarchy

By Edwin Torkelsen

DEPARTMENTS

3 Editorial

The Ministry of Christian Journalism in a Time of Controversy

By Monte Sahlin

12 Heritage

From Adventism to Spiritualism: John Fetzer's Spiritual Journey

By Ronald L. Numbers

24 Book Review

How an Apologist for Traditional Adventism Misunderstands Science

By Ervin Taylor

26 Alden Thompson

Sanctification by Senility

29 Contributors

30 Barely Adventist

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The Ministry of Christian Journalism in a Time of Controversy

By Monte Sahlin

The art of journalism has intertwined with pastoral ministry throughout my adult life. As a theology student in the 1960s, I worked nights on the city desk at a daily newspaper. During my first year in ministry at the Voice of Prophecy, I served as assistant editor of *VOP News*, which had a circulation at the time larger than any other Seventh-day Adventist periodical. After graduate school, I worked as a communication director for an Adventist institution and spent some years directing urban ministries, which depended on developing relationships with local journalists while also pastoring congregations. I have edited a union conference paper and taught journalism, helped community outreach projects develop relationships with civic leaders and local media, and played a key role in managing communications and media while serving as a staff member for the denomination's North American Division, while at the same time serving as Church Ministries director.

As a retired minister, I accepted the role of CEO for Adventist Today Foundation because to me, the ministry of journalism is a sacred calling. And real journalism is independent, balanced, wholistic, and professional in its fact-finding and reporting.

Unlike any other Adventist publication that I am aware of, we are not sponsored by any organization or institution. We serve only our readers and supporters. We provide information, commentary, and resources that meet their needs. Our readers include many different kinds of Adventists—clergy, local church leaders, church members, former members, people with family connections, members of the smaller denominations and independent groups—as well as Christians and religious scholars who have an interest in the Adventist faith.

In addition to this printed magazine, Adventist Today Foundation has become the publisher of a monthly PDF edition, a website, a weekly email newsletter, videos, several kinds of social media, and books in both paperback and eBook formats. From what I am told in a regular stream of emails and letters, God has used these resources to bless many lives over the 25 years of *Adventist Today's* history.

A Troubled Time for Journalism

But we live in a troubled time for the media, with unprecedented turmoil and sophisticated manipulation unlike anything I have witnessed in my lifetime. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of Americans said that the accuracy and quality of news in the media is getting worse, and only 23 percent said it was getting better, according to a survey conducted earlier this year by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and North Star for the George W. Bush Institute, Freedom House, and Penn Biden Center. Evidence suggests that international forces are using social media, such as Facebook, to manipulate the prejudices of population segments in several nations in order to bend elections toward the desired outcomes. Many fear that this may result in the loss of democracy, freedom of the press, and religious liberty.

Can too much freedom on the internet end up destroying liberty and human rights? An overwhelming torrent of words and data is available online. Much of it is fiction, some of which is honestly believed by certain individuals and some of which is cleverly constructed propaganda. Some of it is fact, but often even skilled observers must do a great deal of research to know the difference. How does the average person with limited time sift fact from fiction?

It is essential to find sources of information that can be trusted, such as publishers that make an honest attempt to separate fact from fiction—and are honest with their readers when this proves to be impossible. We seek to be a trusted source for Adventists and any readers interested in the Adventist faith. We do our best to provide reliable news, factual information, and a range of opinion. We are not driven by the promotional agenda of any institution, department, or association. We do not have any doctrinal agenda or views to promote.

Why do we report negative stories that make Adventist individuals and organizations look bad? Simply because we report the reality of things that actually happen. We do not create negative events, and in fact, we report an equal or greater number of

Continued on page 29

We don't make reality; we simply try to report it in a balanced and straightforward manner.

A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HIDDEN CHRIST

By Smuts van Rooyen

*Break Thou the bread of life,
Dear Lord, to me,
As Thou didst break the loaves
Beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page
I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee,
O living Word!*¹

WHEN I FIRST HEARD THE TERM “A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH Christ,” it was a wonderfully shocking, new concept to me. It took my coat from the musty closet in the hallway and hung it on a hook in the sunshine shining through the glass panes of the front door. The new paradigm said that salvation did not come by being “in the truth,” nor by belonging to the right church, nor by buying in to its doctrines and standards, but by a personal relationship with the Savior. The individual introducing this novel concept to me took care to remind me that even the devil knows “the truth” but, nevertheless, stands sweating in his gumboots. So, it was game over for me, and I gladly accepted the alternative of relationship theology.

Unfortunately, the bringer of this good news never instructed me as to precisely what a personal relationship with an unseen Christ is like. But I was content for the moment. I was that blind man who’d been touched by Jesus and now saw people as trees walking: it beats not seeing at all, but you do bump into the furniture. Still, it was progress.

Then came the day when Brenda, our choral director, caught me near the piano on the stage with a question. “Pastor, I just don’t get this business of ‘a personal relationship with Christ’

that you speak of. It sounds wonderful, but I don’t know how to operationalize it. I can see how a relationship works with my husband or with my dog. My husband gives me a good-morning kiss at breakfast, and the dog rolls over when I play with her. But show me how a relationship with the unseen Christ works.”

Brenda had raised an unresolved issue from which I’d protected myself for years. She had caught me, red-handed, engaging in the fine art of preacher sloganeering. Fortunately, I’d had enough presence of mind to admit that I could not address her concerns with anything of real worth at that moment, and I’d asked for time to find more clarity. I told her I would get back to her, but soon afterward Brenda moved away to further her studies. Here is some of what I did not know to tell her.

Alternatives that Don’t Work

Two basic approaches to a relationship with the unseen God presented themselves to me in time.

The first was mysticism. It attempts to take its acolytes away from this world into another “more real” world. In some religions that meant magic mushrooms or temple prostitutes, thereby putting a divine purpose to getting stoned out of your head or experiencing sexual ecstasy! But I’m not up for that. This world matters to me. I like a sober head and the green grass of planet Earth under my bare feet.

Christian mysticism is not for me, either. It seems, in my view, to want God to appear in the room despite the elusiveness of his presence as taught in the Scriptures. I don’t have the stomach for the asceticism that Christian mysticism loves; I enjoy coffee and sandwiches. I don’t want to place affective experience,



as important as that is, over knowledge of God. Above all, mysticism's pursuit of perfection seems to be an invitation to spend life trying to climb a greased pole.

The second approach was to be very concrete. I could focus on the Bible, doctrine, and church organization as they are—in and of themselves—and fool myself that a relationship with them is equivalent to a relationship with Christ.

The problem here is that it conflates God with his gifts to us. This happened at times in the history of God's people. The Lord gave the Ark of the Covenant to Israel, and they trusted in its inherent power to win their battles, but eventually it was taken into captivity (1 Sam. 4:1-11). The Lord also gave the Temple to his people, and they thought that it would keep Jerusalem from being destroyed, but it suffered obliteration (Jer. 7:1-4). God gave his chosen ones the Scriptures, and they thought that the documents gave them eternal life, while totally missing the point of the enterprise (John 5:39).

Nowadays we do a similar thing with the church and the Bible. But when we confuse the gifts with the Giver, we turn gifts into idols. Use and abuse are not the same thing.

I could not, therefore, hope for a relationship with Christ by means of bibliolatry or ecclesiolatry. Been there, done that, and failed.

The Concept of Relationship

In simple terms, a relationship develops when two people participate in each other's lives. They have some sense of bound-up-with-ness between them. They create a psychological two-way street.

Of course, this mutual participation in one another's lives may be a good thing or a bad one. Like baking a cake, it depends on the ingredients put into the batter. Generally speaking, a cake needs more sugar than salt. A relationship with the unseen Christ seems to work in the same way.

But how is participation in Christ's life possible? The apostle Paul explained his relationship with Christ as a matter of identifying with the Savior's story and mission. He declared: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, NIV). He seems to have embraced the mission—the purpose for which Christ lived—as his very own and thus entered Christ's story. Christ, in return, participated in Paul's life by loving him.

Entering Another's Story

Let me remind you of the enormous importance of stories. A story is not simply an illustration, nor is it the mere linkage of events in a sequence like railcars in a train. It is, rather, a powerful way of defining ourselves. As every good counselor knows, humans are a bundle of stories. To a significant degree, we consist of our experiences—our narratives—of the past. From our story, our experiences, we create our pathology, our meaning, our personalities, our truth. Although some would throw chemistry into the mix, too, I will submit to you that story is the very fabric of our lives.

The amazing thing about our story is that we can choose to change it, if we like, by adopting a new one for ourselves. It's as simple as that. We can recast our history, and hence our identity, by participating in someone else's story.

When I arrived stateside from South Africa, my ancestral narrative was that of Blood River. On its banks my Afrikaner people made a covenant with God. Their covenant proposed that if God would give them—400 or so trekking white people—victory over the thousands of Zulu warriors that were about to attack them, they would commit themselves to being his people and be the stewards of Africa. My forebears, the Afrikaners, then defeated the enemy with their superior weaponry.

The glorious truth is we can adopt Christ's dream, embrace his mission as ours, and thus enter into a relationship with him even when he is not visible to our sight.

This experience shaped their identity. The story instilled in them (and in me) an overbearing sense of self-righteousness and gave us the conviction that we were God's chosen race in Africa. As a result, the domination and suppression of the black races in our country became viewed as our God-given right.

This was my heritage, my triumphalist story.

When I came to the United States, a thoughtful person gave me a biography of Abraham Lincoln. The issue of race and slavery gripped me. I saw wholly new possibilities for myself in another man's history. The president's assassination in particular shook me. Here was a human who died of a gunshot wound to the head, because he worked for the freedom of others. I yearned to participate in such a meaningful purpose and consciously decided that I too would die to my disgraceful prejudice and arrogance. I melted down the metal of my story and recast it in Lincoln's mold. He was now my true ancestor, since his purposes were my own. Adopting the Nike slogan, I just did it: I created a new identity by adopting a new story.

The glorious truth is we can adopt Christ's dream, embrace his mission as ours, and thus enter into a relationship with him, even when he is not visible to our sight.

Willing to Suffer

Yet again, the apostle Paul says: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then

we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:16-17, NIV).

Here Paul seems to be saying that the Spirit gives to us the sense that we are children of God when we share in Christ's suffering. We know we have entered the purposes of Christ's life when we suffer for them as he did. A price may be paid for living out the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:11-12), for challenging the religious identity of leadership (John 8:34-47), for condemning odious religion (Matt. 23:13-32), for radically reinterpreting established standards (Mark 3:1-6), for seeking justice for all (John 8:1-11), for establishing the kingdom of God (Mark 15:25-26), and for ministering to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19).

Suffering for and with humanity brings a decided sense of reality to a relationship with Christ, especially since, as Paul says, the Spirit adds his testimony to it.

The Power of Symbols

Symbols are powerful ways of participating in relationships with others (think wedding ring, for example) and with Christ (think baptism, foot washing, wine and bread).

A remarkable dimension of being human is our inherent capacity to use symbols to grasp new realities. Symbols are instruments that help us jump over a wall into a formerly unseen garden. Playing around with symbols is as instinctive to us as taking to water is for furry goslings. Our capacity to use symbols is not to be sniffed at; it undergirds all of our ways of knowing (i.e., our epistemology). Our babies are programmed to twig onto the symbolic system of language and learn to understand the world they don't yet know by using it; that "Da" means "daddy" is deceptively powerful stuff.

To understand the universe, humans (not all of us to the same degree) use the symbolic system of mathematics, the abstract science of number, quantity, and space. No one seems to know why math has such incredible explanatory power. Time and again in equations, an x and y , or an a and b , put us in touch with vast, unknown realities such as the nature of gravity and the distance to a star. Science cannot operate without mathematics.

Moreover, my species often uses symbols to paint ideas (not mere pictures) on canvas. Van Gogh's painting of a twirly, starry night with a little church perched in the center is not about astronomy, but about a particular madness. And the composer Mahler, in his magnificent Second Symphony, beats back his feelings of mortality with rolling tympani and resounding organ pipes—all recorded with little dots on a page. Even the movement

of homo sapiens' limbs in dance symbolically gives expression to our feelings in a way that words cannot.

But we will not belabor the point. All of this is so amazing as to take one's breath away.

Is it any wonder, then, that Christ gave us specific symbols so that we might participate in his life? "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'" (Luke 22:19-20, NIV). Although we do not now see him, the elements of the communion service help us to participate in his life.

But in which way? How "real" are they? There is an ongoing discussion within Christianity as to whether these symbols are simple mental reminders of Jesus' death or if they are more than mere metaphorical representations. The Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli viewed the Eucharist as no more than a sort of string tied around his forefinger to remind him to remember Jesus—a notion embraced by many Seventh-day Adventists. Luther did not agree. He refused to see only a mental construct in the elements. Luther saw the real presence of Christ in them, affirming a doctrine of sacramental union in which the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, offered and received with the bread and the wine. In his typical fashion, Luther vehemently argued that Jesus had said, "This is my body, this is my blood." And because Christ said it was so, so it was. Period.

In one apocryphal story, the two men were in discussion about this when Zwingli walked over to the door of the room and said to Luther, "Jesus also said, 'I am the door.' So let me introduce you to Jesus."

My inclination is to go with Luther's view, simply because when I partake of the elements, I feel Christ's special presence in a powerful and unexplainable way. Zwingli's illustration is, in my humble view, too cute by far.

The Dimension of Mystery

In the ancient Christian hymn recorded in 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul seems to instruct the young man Timothy to sing. The song is important, because the apostle says that all true godliness springs from great mystery. It builds to a verbal crescendo, going from Earth to heaven. I would love to have heard a congregation belt it out. Here are the lyrics:

"He appeared in the flesh,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,

was believed in the world,
was taken up in glory" (NIV).

To the understandable dimensions of a relationship odyssey—namely, story, suffering, and symbol—we must, therefore, add mystery. How can one not do so, given such scripturally important features as incarnation, resurrection, miracle, and Spirit?

By mystery (call it Christian mysticism, if you like), I mean that there is a depth, a richness, an unsearchableness of the mind and ways of God, which are beyond our empirical and rational reach and leave us in the smoke, the mist, the dark—but rejoicing (Rom. 11:33-36; 2 Chron. 6:1; Eccl. 3:11; Matt. 11:25).

Mystery is not about resolving problems but is, rather, about an invitation to endless discovery. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching unto God. The temptation is to declare a final demonstration of proof where none is to be had, as in quantum electrodynamics (QED). But alas, we cannot treat either poetry or relationship theology as we do physics.

Billy Collins says it well in his poem *Introduction to Poetry*:

"I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means."

So, Brenda, this is what I come to: I waterski on the surface of the notion of a personal relationship with the unseen One, and wave at the shore. **AT**

AN IMAGE OF THE ROMAN HIERARCHY:

Are We Repeating History?

BY EDWIN TORKELSEN

SOME TIME AGO I CAME ACROSS A DETAIL IN A STATEMENT BY Ellen White I had not previously noticed. You may recall that she wrote in *The Great Controversy* that Protestant churches in the United States will one day seek to enforce “religious duty” by state, or secular, power. By this act, “the churches would themselves form an image to the beast.”¹ In an earlier description of the same events, she used another expression: “Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy.”²

An image of the Roman hierarchy? The words almost jumped off the page. While “beast” is a metaphor subject to interpretation, “Roman hierarchy” is a fairly concrete and clear term.

Since noticing this particular expression, I cannot escape the thought that this statement goes beyond churches merely asking the state to enforce “religious duty.” For a group of churches to become an image of the Roman hierarchy, it would also have to adopt some of the general ideas, ideological structures, procedures, mentality, and attitudes that historically have characterized the Roman hierarchy. Let’s take a look at some examples.

Characteristics of the Roman Hierarchy

After the passing of the apostles, a class (*ordo*) was gradually created within the church that came to be known as the clergy (*clerus*), separated and distinctly different in status, competence, and function from the common members, or laity (*laicus*). The body of the church was divided into two distinct groups. From the second century, the clergy tried to establish church authority to meet the challenges from Gnosticism and other heterodox ideas. In addition to pastoral functions, the clergy wanted to safeguard doctrinal purity and organizational order. The overseers (bishops) acquired a right to define, teach, and control doctrines, as well as care for church management.³

A hierarchy was formed within the clerical class: four minor and three major levels. Deacon, priest, and bishop formed the three major tiers, with the bishop at the apex as the only full priest in possession of all clerical rights and privileges. Deacons and priests served as the bishops’ assistants.

A notion of male headship, based on common secular social traditions, pushed women into the background and underpinned a leadership construct limited to males only.⁴ Spiritual elitism was introduced: The clergy claimed to be in possession of a greater portion of the Holy Spirit—transmitted to them through the chain of apostolic succession—than common believers possessed. This idea is reflected in German and Scandinavian terminology, where clerics are called “geistlige” (from the German word *Geist*, or spirit). The additional portion of the Holy Spirit qualified the clergy for their spiritual functions as pastors, as well as their administrative functions.

The rite of ordination, elevated to sacrament, inducted a male into the clerical class. It transferred to him that extra portion of the Holy Spirit, which he could never lose (*character indelebilis*), and the exclusive clerical rights and privileges pertaining to his specific level of clergy. Three sets of clerical rights were reserved for bishops: the right to teach (*potestas magisterii*), the right to consecrate and ordain (*potestas ordinis*), and the right to “govern” (*potestas iurisdictionis*). Only the bishop exercised all three powers in their fullness within his bishopric; the bishop of Rome, or pope (the *Pater Patrum*, or Father of the Fathers), claimed to possess these rights globally (*plenitudo potestatis*).

During the Middle Ages, the church developed the teaching of the secular arm (*brachium saeculare*), which claimed that the secular powers derived their authority from the pope and, therefore, should be at the disposal of the church and exercised

according to its bidding (the hierocratic doctrine).⁵ This idea supported the theory of papal supremacy⁶ and the ecclesiastical, religious, economic, and political-secular powers of the clergy. The secular princes never fully accepted these claims, which caused intense strife between church and state.⁷

After the clergy appeared, the church was now composed of two distinct groups: clergy and people (*clerus et populus*). By the Late Middle Ages, some claimed that only the clergy properly constituted the church.⁸

These “spirit-filled” clergy, who manned the ecclesiastical courts and gathered in church councils, were not averse to using coercion and force against all who did not comply with their demands and policies. Through papal bulls, inquisition, excommunication, and interdict, the clergy ruled over people’s minds, hearts, and salvation. They boldly challenged the authority of princes, kings, and emperors. Beginning in the 12th century, the decrees and bulls of popes and statements and decisions of councils were compiled as an ecclesiastical law book known as *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (since 1917 revised and called the *Codex Iuris Canonici*).⁹

Repeating History?

Today’s discussions about women’s ordination seem to be only a minor symptom of a much greater threat. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church about to repeat history by constructing—incrementally and almost imperceptibly—“an image of the Roman hierarchy”?

Some may find this a far-fetched idea, the product of an unsanctified conspiratorial mind. After all, don’t we have statements of beliefs and definitions of rites that distance us from the ideas of the Middle Ages? Theory is one thing; but actions speak louder than words. I note a possible move away from our fundamental belief in the egalitarian royal priesthood of all believers and from the equality of all in Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Gal. 3:28), with bonds of unity formed by our common faith in Jesus that are forged by the Holy Spirit’s gifts to us and fruits in us. Are we headed in the direction of the Roman hierarchy who, with the purpose of saving souls and preserving church unity, wanted to force people into compliance with church edicts?

Some voices insist on unconditional submission to authority that demands universal obedience. A wedge has been forced between male and female by men wanting power over women, claiming it is the will of God. A gender ideology foreign to the spirit of Christ and backed by threats of dire consequences invites us to embrace uniformity. Strangely, a growing reflection of the mentality of the old Roman hierarchy is looming on the horizon.

True spiritual unity will always have Christ as its focal point—not men, women, rules, or policies—and it will never be attained through coerced uniformity.

Who Among Us Is the Greatest?

The disciples discussed who among them would have the top positions in the administrative hierarchy of the new kingdom. Jesus turned their hierarchical ideas upside-down when he answered and, by his example, showed them that the greatest among them should be everyone’s servant (Mark 9:33; 10:35; Luke 9:46; John 13:4). Since then the church has never ceased to answer that question itself by turning the pyramid, with its multiple layers, back up again with its human apex on the top.

Are we gradually establishing a special class of clergy within the Seventh-day Adventist Church? We used to call our preachers “ministers,” which means “to attend to the needs of others.” They were to be servants of God and the church. We still use that name, but additional elements seem to be gradually emerging:

- We have created groups with authority and functions that *require* ordination. Within this ordained class is a hierarchy of levels—deacons, elders, commissioned ministers, and ordained ministers—that assigns to each level a higher status and more privileges than the level below. By excluding women from the highest level of ordination, the church has effectively barred them from holding any top-level leadership positions.
- We induct new members to this special class using the term and rite of *ordination*. The term itself is loaded with medieval ideas, such as sacramental infusion of an extra portion of the Holy Spirit through apostolic succession, transfer of inherent qualifications for the exercise of *cura animarum* (care of souls), certain functions (weddings, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper) that *require* the appropriate level of ordination, the idea that ordination is *for life* and globally valid, all summed up in the idea of a *character idelebilis*. We may not in theory subscribe to these ideas, but nonetheless our policies have declared ordination to be a *sine qua non* for performing these functions and gaining access to top leadership positions. In functional terms, we too have made ordination into something more than a simple recognition of gifts and prayer of blessing.
- We reserve the top level of leadership for men, based on the millennia-old misogyny ideology of male headship. Our policy against all kinds of discriminations contradicts itself through an exception clause. Our arguments to defend the ordained minister’s exclusive status could have been copied straight from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹⁰
- We have a book listing 28 fundamental beliefs, which

in practice is moving ever closer to a *creed*. Originally this document was an informational statement. Now it has been incorporated into baptismal vows as a *condition for acceptance* into our church. Declaring commitment to Christ alone is apparently no longer sufficient.

- We attempt to exercise social control down to the smallest details of private life, such as clothing. One conference has printed and distributed a pamphlet with pictures of models in casual clothes that it considers proper to wear at camp meetings, thereby demonstrating that its leaders do not trust people's ability to decide this for themselves. Some pieces of jewelry (tie pins and cufflinks for men) are allowed, while others (bracelets, necklaces, finger and ear rings for women) are not—but for some reason

are *always and unconditionally* expressing God's infallible will in both process and content. However, the reports and assessments of the proceedings of the 2015 San Antonio Council have not been reassuring.¹³ The principles of liberal democratic governance demonstrated by the early church, aiming for consensus and respecting minority views, seem to be replaced by an authoritarian governance style that arbitrarily chooses to overlook the fact that a solid minority view is just as valid and representative of the Seventh-day Adventist church body as the majority view. It is not "private individuals" holding "private opinions" who speak through the minority votes, but an equally representative section of the same church body who voice conscientiously held convictions.¹⁴

WE PRAISE THE MINORITIES AND INDIVIDUALS WHO DARED TO THINK DIFFERENT THOUGHTS CENTURIES AGO, BUT WE FEAR THOSE WHO DO SO TODAY.

braided hair is still considered fine, even if this also is mentioned in Peter's oft-quoted list (1 Pet. 3:3, RSV).¹¹

- We have elevated manuals, policies, and guidelines to an Adventist *Codex Iuris Canonici*. Denominational leaders now declare compliance to be universally mandatory, unless exemptions have been granted by the Adventist *curia*.
- We are guided by a legal *corpus* conceived under the auspices of a curial bureaucracy. The General Conference *Working Policy* is not readily available to church members and is difficult for even employees to read, which is inexcusable, considering that its content is about them and the church they support. Changes to its content are formally voted by delegates to the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee. Delegates who are not trained attorneys would be hard-pressed to understand all of the legalese in the policy items, which often resemble a crossbreed of legal rule and a verbose sermon.¹²

A Will to Coerce

I am disturbed by the thinly disguised threats of force to make all church entities comply with every detail in rules and policies, whether or not these rules strengthen or weaken our mission. Are we developing a centralized "rule by policies" enforced by our church *curia*?

I have noticed that some leaders and a few members point to *simple majority* votes by Adventist councils, as if such decisions

This challenge is tempting some to seek refuge in a hierarchical authority structure. The union conference-based system of distributed authority that in 1901 removed universal executive authority from the center and distributed effective authority to local entities is now threatened by a possible reversal.¹⁵ The specter of "kingly" power emerges in terms such as "higher" and "lower" levels of authority, betraying the hierarchical notion that members on the ground have only inferior and limited authority that is subordinate to the superior and higher authority of somebody far away.

The main motivational argument for this bureaucratic approach seems to be that control and order are necessary to preserve unity.¹⁶ This argument was used when the clergy was originally formed in the second century. It was used by Augustine of Canterbury, Pope Gregory the Great's missionary to Britain, when he tried to force the Celtic church to submit to the established Roman order. It was used by popes, church councils, and the Inquisition to suppress the Albigensians, the Hussites, the Waldenses, and everyone else who dared to oppose the Roman *Curia*, its legal framework, and its head bishop. The church used the same argument against the great reformers whom Ellen G. White praised so highly. By their brave opposition not only to false doctrines regarding salvation, but also to the spurious ideas of clerical governance and the established authority of the Roman hierarchy, they became the founding fathers of the Protestant

churches. Since its foundation, the Adventist movement has claimed to be the heir that continues the reforming work of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the Anabaptists.

I see some similarities between what is happening in my church today and what has happened before. We praise the minorities and individuals who dared to think different thoughts centuries ago, but we fear those who do so today. Like the powers of those days, we seem to think that unity can be achieved and preserved through uniformity and, when necessary, disciplinary coercive actions. It did not work well in the past, and it will probably not work any better today. A true church will never allow itself to be coerced into submission to the bureaucratic policy dictates of any leader or council. A true church lives and flourishes by the *voluntary adherence* of its individual members to their common faith and mission.

Martin Luther's example at the Diet of Worms (1521) teaches us that in matters of conscience, it is not safe to submit to threats and dictates by secular or ecclesiastical authorities. Only well-reasoned arguments based on a reading of Scripture that rests firmly on sound hermeneutic principles has any value. If some point only to proof texts—interpreted out of context in a literalistic and unreflective way—and old traditions, councils, and policies, no disciplinary coercive process will achieve true unity. Threats couched in pious exhortations and friendly smiles will not for long hide the iron fist inside the velvet glove.

The Spirit's Voice

I think the Holy Spirit over the past several decades has been trying to make his voice heard among us, urging us to do some *rethinking about what constitutes unity* based on faith and justice and about what does not promote faith, justice, or unity. Could it be that the Spirit is trying to lead us forward by bringing us back to where the early Christian church was?

Our church has for years treated the women in our midst unfairly, more in harmony with medieval cultural, social, and ecclesiastical traditions and scholastic theological thinking than with the Bible. I believe the Spirit is grieved when we use the Bible to exclude women from being full and equal members of our church and our workforce, when we pay them less than men (unless the state forces us to act justly), and bar them from holding certain leadership positions reserved for men only.

We are guilty of refusing to recognize that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to whomever the Spirit will, regardless of *our* attempts to control the distribution of these gifts the way we want them,

through humanly devised policies and regulations. Our own hard hearts; our adoration of practices, customs, and traditions hoary with age; and our stubborn adherence to the dictates of male-dominated cultural and social structures have for centuries fueled male hunger for status and power—ideas that betray patriarchal pride. Is it possible that we have closed the door in the face of the Holy Spirit by inventing policies that try to prevent the Spirit's work in our hearts, minds, and lives, both individually and corporately?

It seems we are suffering under a burden of problems of our own making.

The Jerusalem Council

The early Christians had their share of hotheads contending over traditions and policies that threatened to disrupt the fledgling church. Circumcision was important because some believed that God mandated this rite for all men, everywhere, and for all time. They could quote clear texts from God's Word. The lesson for us to learn today, however, has nothing to do with circumcision and a little to do with ordination but everything to do with our patterns of thought and conflict resolution.

Some search the story of the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15 to find support for their claim to *authority* and for the right and power to *command and control* the church: the council voted, and that is it!¹⁷ Fortunately leaders were present at that council who had the necessary humility to think in harmony with the Spirit outside the authority, power, and policy box. Why don't we follow the reasoning of James, Peter, and Paul when they simply pointed to the realities "on the ground" and how the Spirit was working among those who did not follow the precepts, rules, and policies of the traditionalists?

The Jerusalem Council discovered that the threat of schism disappeared when they stopped thinking in yes/no, dictate-by-majority, black-and-white, either-or terms and instead decided, together with the Spirit, that the conflict could be resolved by simply opting for a simple both-and consensus solution that respected the conscientious convictions on both sides. What a glorious example of what it means to "submit to one another" in a mutual manner, instead of a one-way demand to repent and "submit to me!"

Was the question of authority the focal point in that council? Not for Paul. In his letters he hardly alludes to this council as a source of authority. And he blatantly and openly disregarded the

Continued on page 31

FROM ADVENTISM TO SPIRITUALISM: JOHN FETZER'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

By Ronald L. Numbers¹

In the fall of 1918, as a deadly influenza epidemic swept across the United States, a young Seventh-day Adventist preacher, Claude L. White, pitched his tent in Lafayette, Indiana, in preparation for an evangelistic “effort.”² Among those who attended—and converted to Adventism—were Della Frances Fetzer and her two children, Harriet (Hattie) and John, who had been attending a Methodist church.³

“Among the number who took their stand for the truths which [Elder White] presented, was a young man of exceptional ability along scientific lines, especially radio engineering,” reported a church paper several years later, referring to John.⁴ “When he gave his heart to God, he also gave his life, mind, and future to the spreading

of the great plan of salvation. He saw the possibilities of the use of radio in proclaiming to the world the news of the soon coming of Jesus.”⁵

Although the Adventists had operated a 60-bed sanitarium in Lafayette since 1908 and were approaching a membership of 1,800 in Indiana, there is no evidence that the Fetzers had had any prior contact with Seventh-day Adventists.⁶

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, formally organized in 1863, had emerged from the so-called Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, when, contrary to the expectations of tens of thousands of Millerite believers—and mathematical calculations based on biblical prophecies—Christ had not returned to Earth. Shortly after the

disappointment, a 17-year-old from Portland, Maine, began experiencing trance-like “visions,” in which she witnessed events past, present, and future. The young woman was Ellen Harmon (known as Ellen G. White after her marriage to James White in 1845).⁷

In one of her first visions, God explained to Ellen that salvation could be granted only to those who observed the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, as instructed by the Ten Commandments. During another vision, using wings provided by the Lord, she flew with her unnamed angel attendant from one heavenly abode to another, occasionally stopping to chat with the local inhabitants.⁸ The young prophet also endorsed the purported vision of another former Millerite,



When John Fetzer threw in his lot with the Seventh-day Adventists, he adopted a distinctive cosmology. Although devoid of the spirits of the deceased, it abounded with supernatural beings.

who said that the Millerites had been correct about the date, just wrong about the event. Instead of the time for the second coming of Christ, October 22, 1844, had marked the beginning of the “investigative judgment” of the righteous and the wicked in heaven. The end was still nigh.

The nature of Harmon’s visions attracted considerable interest among both followers and critics. According to the testimony of numerous physicians and curiosity seekers, her vital functions slowed alarmingly, with her heart beating sluggishly and respiration becoming imperceptible. Both she and her small band of disciples considered the visions to be genuine revelations from God, identical in nature to those of the biblical prophets (see Acts 2:17).⁹

Skeptics, however, offered various other explanations. Many attributed them to mesmerism (also called animal magnetism and, later, hypnotism), which had been spreading through the country since the mid-1830s.¹⁰ At times even Ellen doubted the nature of her revelations. Were they possibly the effect of mesmerism or, worse yet, a Satanic delusion? During one person’s attempt to mesmerize her while she was speaking, Ellen sensed “a human influence” being exerted against her and remembered God’s promise to send a second angel if ever she were in danger of falling under an earthly influence. Raising her arms heavenward, she cried: “Another angel, Father! another angel!” She said that at once she was freed from the

mesmerist’s sinister power and went on speaking in peace.¹¹

Shortly after reports began coming out of upstate New York in the spring of 1848 regarding the Fox sisters’ sensational experiments with spiritualism, detractors began accusing Ellen White of being a spiritualist, no doubt because of the fact that a number of ex-Millerites were joining the spiritualists and because of her own claims to communicate with the supernatural world.¹² Indeed, the career of a prophet in many ways paralleled that of a spiritualist medium; as R. Laurence Moore once pointed out, mediumship was “one of the few career opportunities open to women in the nineteenth century.”¹³ As even White realized, there was no way phenomenologically

to differentiate her visions from the trances of a run-of-the-mill mesmerist or spiritualist. Thus she distanced herself from other trance mediums, not on the basis of physical evidence but of spiritual content.¹⁴

Within a year of hearing about the Fox sisters, White received a vision exposing their diabolical practice. “I saw that the mysterious knocking in N. Y. and other places,” she reported, “was the power of Satan; and that such things would be more and more

accomplished by this same power.”¹⁶

In 1858, in the first version of her seminal *The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels*, Ellen White devoted an entire chapter to spiritualism and “the rapping delusion.” Satan, she explained, “has the power to bring the appearance of forms before us purporting to be our relatives and friends that now sleep in Jesus.”¹⁷ She particularly condemned “spiritualist physicians,”

When John Fetzer threw in his lot with the Seventh-day Adventists, he adopted a distinctive cosmology. Although devoid of the spirits of the deceased, it abounded with supernatural beings: the inhabitants of other worlds as well as the innumerable hosts of good and evil angels, engaged in what Ellen White liked to call “the great controversy.” On more than one occasion, she described the unseen world: “Could our eyes be opened we should see

“The first official Seventh-day Adventist radio broadcasting station [installed at what is now Andrews University in Michigan] was built and equipped by two students of the college, John E. Fetzer and George Peterson.”



common, clothed in a religious garb, to lull the deceived to more security.”¹⁵ A little later she conflated spiritualism with mesmerism, deeming both manifestations of Satan: “I saw that the mysterious rapping was the power of Satan; some of it was directly from him, and some indirectly, through his agents; but it all proceeded from Satan. ... I was shown that these modern magicians would yet account for all the miracles wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ by the rapping and mesmerism, and many would believe that all the mighty works of the Son of God, when he was on the earth, were

who healed by channeling Satan’s “electric currents.”¹⁸ Throughout the 1850s the Adventists’ leading paper, *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, which was edited primarily by James White, published more than 250 articles on the topic. Even as confessions of fraud came from the Fox sisters in the 1880s, Ellen White insisted that “The mysterious rapping with which modern spiritualism began was not the result of human trickery or cunning, but was the direct work of evil angels, who thus introduced one of the most successful of soul-destroying delusions.”¹⁹

forms of evil angels around us, trying to invent some new way to annoy and destroy us. And we should also see the angels of God guarding us from their power; for God’s watchful eye is over Israel for good, and he will protect and save his people, if they put their trust in him.”²⁰

Of special importance was the “guardian angel” assigned to “every follower of Christ.” These heavenly beings, White explained, “shield the righteous from the power of the wicked one” and, if saints were tempted to do wrong, would be “by your side, prompting you to a better

course, choosing your words for you, and influencing your actions.²¹

Repeated crises roiled the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the early 20th century. In 1907 the Battle Creek church “disfellowshipped” Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, whose chain of sanitariums and prolific writings had made him the most powerful and influential Adventist in the world. Officially, he was excommunicated because of his antagonism “to the gifts now manifest in the church” and his alliance “with those who are attempting to overthrow the work for which this church existed.”²² However, some critics, including Mrs. White, also charged the doctor with teaching pantheism.

Eight years later the founding prophet died, throwing the denomination into a period of confusion and self-examination. In 1919, just a year after John Fetzer joined the church, leading elders organized an unprecedented secret conference to take up the “delicate question” of White’s authority as an interpreter of the Bible and as a historian.²³ Particularly troubling was the prophet’s habit of plagiarizing and relying on assistants to draft her publications.

Not much is known about Fetzer’s spiritual journey before he joined the Adventists as a 17-year-old. However, at age 10 or 11 he apparently experienced a vision of “holding upon the leg of Jesus Christ,” who assured him, “I will always be with you.”²⁴ In 1918, the year he became an Adventist, young John came down with the influenza virus that killed hundreds of

thousands of Americans, leaving him bedridden for nine months. “I made a commitment,” he later recalled, “that if I were permitted to live, I would devote my life to the spiritual work of the Creator.”²⁵ By this time he was taking an avid interest in the wireless communications pioneered by Guglielmo Marconi and Nikola Tesla, earning an amateur radio license in 1919. After graduating from high school in 1921, Fetzer enrolled in some wireless classes offered by Purdue University, located in his hometown of West Lafayette, Indiana.²⁶

About this time another young radio buff visited Fetzer at home to compare experiences. “Upon his table I found a very neat wireless set, an open Bible, and some tracts on the destruction of the earth,” the visitor noted. “All these interested me and caused me to ask many questions. Mr. Fetzer patiently answered them all. With many Bible studies and talks, he slowly but surely led me to understand some of the great truths heretofore hidden in the Bible.” That visit became “the turning-point” in the young man’s life. He subsequently joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and enrolled in an Adventist college with Fetzer.²⁷

In the fall of 1922, having earned a first-class license as a commercial radio operator, Fetzer enrolled with his friend and roommate George Peterson in Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC, later Andrews University), a small Seventh-day Adventist school in Berrien Springs, Michigan, with an enrollment of close

to 500 students.²⁸ Apparently the college president, Frederick Griggs, had personally recruited Fetzer to set up a wireless station.²⁹ Within weeks of the young man’s arrival, the regional Adventist paper, *Lake Union Herald*, proudly announced that “Mr. Fetzer, radio expert from Purdue University, has enrolled and installed his own receiving and sending radio outfit in his room. He also has made connections in the parlor.”³⁰ By the end of the academic year, when Fetzer returned to Indiana for the summer to sell Adventist books from door to door, the college radio station, KFGZ, was up and running—and being heard as far away as Pennsylvania.³¹

Late that summer the *Youth’s Instructor*, a national Adventist magazine for young people, carried the following story: “Today the third angel’s message [a synonym for Adventism] is riding on the crest of one of the world’s greatest achievements [the radio]....none ever dreamed a few short years ago, that it could be flashed simultaneously to every corner of the globe....the first official Seventh-day Adventist radio broadcasting station has been installed and put into operation at Emmanuel Missionary College. ... [KFGZ] can be heard distinctly for 100 miles, and often farther than that. It was built and equipped by two students of the college, John E. Fetzer and George Peterson.”³²

Although several American schools vie for the distinction of having the first college radio station, KFGZ ranks among the pioneers of educational broadcasting. For years it remained

the Adventist denomination's only radio station.

The EMC radio station quickly emerged at the cutting edge of Seventh-day Adventist efforts to evangelize the world. In 1926 the popular Adventist magazine *Signs of the Times*, which billed itself as "America's Prophetic Weekly," breathlessly introduced its readers to EMC's "Jazzless Radio Station." Describing the radio as "the most astounding discovery the world has ever seen," the anonymous author went on to position it in what Ellen White called "the great controversy" between Christ and Satan: "when it came but a few short years ago, the devil, always on the job, seized it, and immediately hooked it up with midnight cabarets and jazz orchestras, prize fights, and all the rest of his hellish propaganda centers. God no doubt intends that the radio shall play a major part in the proclamation of the everlasting gospel to all the world before He shall send His Son to earth the second time."³³

When the famous Adventist missionary to the Andes, Ferdinand A. Stahl, visited EMC while on furlough to the United States, he reported being amazed by the broadcasting station. "Having been out in the jungles for so many years, I have not been able to keep in touch with these new and wonderful inventions....but now, I am glad to say, I have had opportunity to study into its deep mysteries," he wrote in the *Review and Herald*. "This broadcasting station reaches hundreds of thousands of people."³⁴

For a few years at least, John Fetzer shared this vision of the radio station as an agent for spreading the gospel. One of his associates at the station, C. Fred Clarke, later described Fetzer and Peterson as "very sincere young men [who] had great visions that the world could be converted to Christianity through the means of Radio Broadcasting."³⁵ Clarke went on to relate an experience Fetzer had shared with him. During an early inspection of the station by the Radio Commission of the Department of Commerce, the equipment initially failed to transmit a signal. "John and George ... both got down on their knees and asked the Lord to help them and again turned the station on, all worked well," reported Clarke. "They used to tell of how the Lord had signally helped in this emergency."³⁶ In the last chapel of 1926, Fetzer shared with his fellow students his dreams for the future of radio. "He said that the purpose of his talk was to kindle the spark of our enthusiasm, and provide material for its combustion in order to enlist our sympathies with the work the radio is doing in giving the message to the world."³⁷ By this time the college was paying Fetzer a salary of \$25 per week for his services at the station.³⁸

A few months earlier, the college had appointed William A. Westworth as pastor and director of the radio station, renamed WEMC, making him the first Adventist "radio evangelist." Previously the president of the Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Westworth had become a devoted radio enthusiast.

He explained in an article addressed to his fellow Adventist ministers: "Just as truly as the printing press, the telegraph, the telephone, and the various methods of rapid transportation of modern times are recognized as divinely ordained means for the finishing of God's work in the earth, so, I believe, we should recognize in the radio a divinely appointed channel of communication whereby the voice of truth may be broadcast through the air and reach unseen audiences of thousands by frequent and regular appointment, and with very little outlay of means. Radio has demonstrated the shortest method for reaching the largest number of people in a direct way."³⁹

Westworth and his colleagues at the station created a virtual congregation, called the Radio Lighthouse Church, which ministered to the spiritual needs of listeners who wrote in with requests for literature or transcriptions of sermons. By 1928 the radio station had three stenographers on staff to assist with this ministry. Behind all of it stood the indispensable John Fetzer, the acknowledged "guiding spirit and the inspiration."⁴⁰

In 1924 Fetzer began dating a perky, dark-eyed coed named Rhea Yeager, who lived in the village with her parents, both Seventh-day Adventists.⁴¹ Pretty soon she was playing cello for the Radio Lighthouse Music Makers on KFGZ. Although attending EMC, Rhea had never joined the church; in fact, according to John, "she resented the whole bit."⁴² Her lack of interest in religious matter

distressed both her parents and the devout John. As their romance blossomed, Rhea opened up to John about her religious feelings. Whatever she said encouraged John, who wrote from his mother's home: "Sweetheart, after our parting chat, somehow I loved you more. I don't know what you said, but you had courage enough to talk to me about God. I always admire individuals who can do that with sincerity. And dear if our love is to last, God will have to rule us and I hope that you will always trust in God and point Him out to me when trouble comes. Won't you, dear?"⁴³

A short time later Rhea formally joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Adventists typically got baptized (by immersion) in early adolescence, but Rhea held out until the summer of 1926—and then did so primarily, it seems, to please John. On hearing the good news, John wrote: "I am so glad to hear about you being Baptized. That was the proper thing to do and I so hope that you will not regret having done so. Sometimes I think one has a poor chance of gaining the next life, but if we ever [hope to] get there we will have to start won't we?"⁴⁴

Less than a month later, John and Rhea were married in a hotel in Benton Harbor, with the college Bible teacher officiating.⁴⁵

Ironically, given Rhea's recent baptism, John himself about this time began going through what he called a traumatic "transitional period" that culminated in his giving up Adventism.⁴⁶ Distinctive doctrines such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the

imminent second coming of Christ, and the 144,000 who would be saved began to trouble him, as did the church's insistence on a literal six-day creation about 6,000 years ago, "knowing full well that the earth was millions or billions of years old, and that the history of man had to be evolutionary."⁴⁷ As he later recalled, "I became very confused, feeling that

During the 1960s one of Fetzer's favorite revelations was *The Urantia Book*, which (though he may not have been aware of it) shared a Seventh-day Adventist history.

there had to be another outlook. I did not know what that substitute would be. I didn't have the tools to research and maybe fight my way out of an environment that I felt was not the place for me."⁴⁸

Although he continued to appreciate the "loving and generous" people with whom he was associated at the college, his doubts continued to grow, especially as he compared one set of fundamentalist dogmas with another. "Once you get trapped in the doctrinaire part of the theology, it's very hard to break shackles," he observed decades later of his exit from Adventism, likening his experience to those of refugees from the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church or Jim Jones' Peoples Temple.⁴⁹

Complicating his "rupture" with the Adventist church was John's souring relationship with the faculty "director" of the radio station, Paul Nelson Pearce, a professor of English.⁵⁰ The earliest evidence of trouble appears in a letter from John's mother to him in 1925. "So far as Professor Piece [sic] is concerned," she advised, "I wouldn't let the little

things that he dose [sic] bother me in the least—you must remember that jealousy started in because Satan was jealous of Christ."⁵¹

The professor, however, became so envious of John's being "in the limelight" that he tried to force John off the air. One colleague at the radio station later described the "extreme jealousy" between the two men, leading to "some very harsh things [being] done and said."⁵² In the end it was Pearce, not Fetzer, who was forced out, replaced in part by Willard "Bill" Shadel, who went on to a distinguished career in network radio and TV.⁵³

In 1925 Seventh-day Adventist church leaders arranged for Fetzer and a colleague to visit Western Europe to learn about the latest

advances in radio technology. The goal, as Fetzer phrased it, was to improve “the promulgation of the Message through the air.”⁵⁴

In May 1927 John Fetzer graduated from Emmanuel Missionary College, one of 27 students who completed the “Literary Course” and one of 53 who earned a bachelor’s degree.⁵⁵ (Graduating with him was Frank Lewis Marsh, who would become a leading creationist writer.)⁵⁶ As one of four class orators, Fetzer delivered an inspiring talk on the class motto, “Faith of Our Fathers,” mentioning the biblical prophets Moses and Daniel, as well as the Protestant reformer Martin Luther and the medical missionary David Livingstone—but not a single Adventist.⁵⁷ Fetzer also received commendation for having received a “superior” distinction in a recent *Signs of the Times* Writers’ Club competition, which traditionally honored the winners with publication in the widely circulated Adventist magazine. Fetzer’s essay, however, never appeared.⁵⁸

After graduation Fetzer remained at EMC as the “chief technician” at WEMC and a sometime instructor in radio transmission. In 1928 he was elected president of the EMC alumni association.⁵⁹ If expressions of concern from his mother are any indication, he seems to have sunk to a low point spiritually that summer. Having learned from John that he was neglecting a study of the Bible and of religion in general, she wrote: “you know the truth and the bible tells us that we must take time to be holy

and you know that the church can get along with out us but we cant get along with out the church[.] it will be a terrible things for us to meet god if we arent prepared[.] people are taken out of the world so unexpected now days that it behooves us to be ready to go any time[.] I hope when you write to me again that you will say that you are taking time each day to study your bible and for prayer. If a man gains the whole world and loses his soul what dose it profeth him. Now think these things over seriously.”⁶⁰

Although John’s reply is missing, it did not encourage his mother. Indeed, she responded with an anguished plea: “Well my dear boy I am so sorry that you feel about Adventism the way you do[.] I hope and pray that the kind of proof you demand will come to you[.] of course I know nothing of or about philosophy and evolution and other thing[s] which have caused you to lose faith in religion[.] I am grieved about the whole thing and I suppose anything that I could say wouldnt convince you any and all that I can do is to pray for you and Rhea[.] I have always done that & I know nothing more to do or say.”⁶¹

We do know that Rhea continued to attend church that fall, and despite John’s growing alienation from the Adventist church, the denomination’s official *Year Book* continued to list him as a “licensed missionary” for the years 1927 through 1930.⁶² In 1929 the Fetzers had moved to Ann Arbor, where John studied physics and mathematics at the University of Michigan—and began exploring religious alternatives.⁶³

As early as 1926, young Fetzer had formed a friendship with a visiting SDA minister from Charlotte, Michigan, Sterling B. Slater, who, under the influence of the prominent Adventist apostate Dudley M. Canright, was expressing doubts about Adventist theology in general and Ellen G. White in particular, as well as about the existence of God. Writing to his young friend, Slater alluded to Fetzer’s ongoing spiritual trial, “the falseness, hypocrisy, and inconsistency which has caused you such bitter disappointment”—all of which Slater himself had been experiencing. Indeed, Slater confided that he had come to view Seventh-day Adventism as “delusion” and a “lie.” He urged Fetzer to read Canright’s *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, a critique of Adventism he found “impregnable.”⁶⁴

About this time Fetzer also began corresponding with other disaffected former Adventists and to collect anti-Adventist literature. Among his correspondents were E. S. Ballenger, publisher of *The Gathering Call*, a monthly magazine critical of SDA teachings, and Thomas and Agnes Madison, whom he had met at EMC, where the former had directed the radio station’s orchestra and the latter had served as the station’s secretary. By 1929 both had left the college and the church. Fetzer deluged these old friends with queries about such topics as Ellen White, Adventist-held biblical prophecies, the seventh-day Sabbath, vegetarianism, and Darwinism. In response, the Madisons shared their

own doubts—and urged John and Rhea Fetzer to sever ties with the Adventists. “It is a wonderful thing to leave S.D.A.’s conscience-free,” they testified about their own experience, “and we feel freedom from Adventism with its spiritual and mental bondage is freedom indeed.”⁶⁵ Early in 1930 the Fetzers joined the Madisons as free ex-Adventists.

When Fetzer’s mother learned of her son’s growing doubts about Adventism and religion, she blamed them on “philosophy and evolution” and vowed to pray for his salvation.⁶⁶ Thus, it must have come as something of a surprise to John to learn just a couple of years later of his mother’s own decision to quit worshipping on the seventh-day Sabbath and explore going “into the Baptist church.”⁶⁷ From time to time she also dabbled in astrology and spiritualism, but eventually she concluded that they were “the devils work.”⁶⁸

Since late 1927 the Radio Lighthouse, WEMC, had been struggling financially, but the Great Depression that struck in the fall of 1929 pushed it to the brink of insolvency. The following year the board of trustees told John Fetzer to sell the station. John, who once bragged that he could “sell fire insurance to cave dwellers,” quickly found a buyer willing to pay \$42,000 for the station, but in the end the prospective owner defaulted and lost his down payment.⁶⁹ With the station on the verge of closing its doors, John made a low-ball offer of \$5,000, which the beleaguered trustees accepted. In anticipation of moving the station

to nearby Kalamazoo, he changed the call letters to WKZO.⁷⁰ From this humble beginning emerged the Fetzer communications and sports empire, including ownership of the Detroit Tigers, who won the 1968 World Series for their owner by defeating the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games.

Freed after 1930 from what he saw as the dogmas and dictates of

already seen, nothing (except perhaps Roman Catholicism) perturbed Ellen White more than spiritualism, which she saw as an ever-present manifestation of Satan and his hosts. She also roundly denounced secret societies such as the Masons.⁷⁴ In 1893 she wrote: “Those who stand under the bloodstained banner of Prince Immanuel cannot be united

In 1911 Sadler spent two months in Europe, allegedly studying psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud and other prominent analysts, though this now seems unlikely. Regardless, Sadler increasingly practiced psychiatry, writing a number of books on the topic.

Adventism, John Fetzer continued on his spiritual quest. After moving to Kalamazoo in 1931, he joined a large Presbyterian church, apparently more for its social contacts than for its Calvinist theology.⁷¹ Of greater significance, he began exploring spiritualism, the esoteric philosophy of theosophy, various forms of Eastern mysticism, and Scottish Rite Masonry, in which he eventually rose to the rank of Sovereign Grand Commander 33^o.⁷²

Spiritualism and Masonry especially symbolized a direct repudiation of the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism.⁷³ As we have

with the Free Masons or with any secret organization. The seal of the living God will not be placed upon anyone who maintains such a connection after the light of truth has shone upon his pathway.”⁷⁵

Fetzer’s interest in theosophy and its Ascended Masters—enlightened humans from the past who had been transformed into revered spiritual beings—brought him in the 1960s and 1970s into contact with an eccentric former EMC classmate, Clifford Burdick, a self-described geologist who, like SDAs generally, attributed the geological column to the work of Noah’s flood.⁷⁶ Apparently

following up on rumors that the Masters had buried recovered gold from ancient Aztec and Incan societies in North American caves, the untrustworthy Burdick insisted that he had discovered a cache of this gold in northern Mexico. To help fund the harvesting of this wealth, he asked Fetzer for financial assistance. For a while Fetzer complied, but after repeatedly losing money to Burdick, he denounced his erstwhile partner for his “bogus activities.”⁷⁷

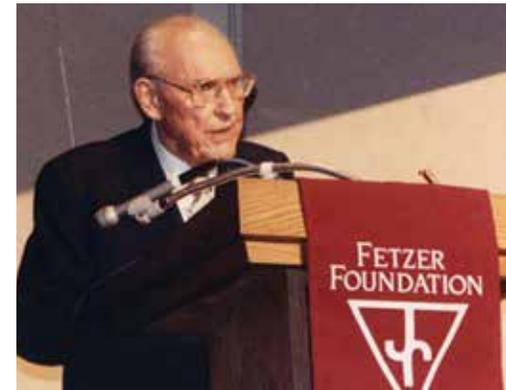
Fetzer, however, retained several continuities with the abandoned

testified that he “would always be present with the Angels, St. Michael the Archangel, the Hierarchy, the Saints, Jesus, and Holy Spirit and the Creator. He would say, ‘If you are having a problem with someone, ask your Guardian Angel to talk to the other person’s Guardian Angel to open the door to a resolution of the issues.’ ... Your guardian Angel is with you at all times, and this is a reality.”⁷⁹

During the last six decades of his life, Fetzer said little about his Adventist roots and seldom interacted with the church, though from time

and those of the higher planes will become commonplace.⁸² He zealously studied such works as the channeled *A Course of Miracles*, *the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the writings of the American psychic Edgar Cayce.⁸³ Fetzer developed close relationships with the celebrity astrologer Jeane Dixon, the astronaut-parapsychologist Edgar Mitchell, and the clairvoyant Jim Gordon.⁸⁴ The more he delved into reincarnation, the more convinced he became of his own past lives, including Ramses II of Egypt.⁸⁵ Instructed by his spirit guides

John Fetzer died in 1991, having risen during the previous decade to a spot on the *Forbes Magazine* list of the 400 richest Americans.



Adventists. White may have condemned spiritualism, but she embraced a cosmology filled with other inhabited worlds and with a multitude of good and evil angels. Like many Catholic mystics and some other religious persons, she believed that God assigned a guardian angel to each human being—at least to those who had not committed the “unpardonable sin” (see Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; and Luke 12:10).⁷⁸ Fetzer seems to have retained a belief in such angels throughout his life. After his death, a close associate

to time in the 1960s and 1970s he donated radio equipment or land to Andrews University, the successor to EMC.⁸⁰ In 1980 the university awarded him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.⁸¹

Likely stimulated in part by his experiences with the transmission of unseen radio and television signals, Fetzer grew ever more interested in the occult. “In the New Age that lies immediately ahead,” he predicted, “through electronic instruments, direct communication between persons on the earth plane

to search out his ancestry, he began an exhaustive genealogical search, often assisted by an Ouija board or trance mediums.⁸⁶

During the 1960s one of Fetzer’s favorite revelations was *The Urantia Book*, which (though he may not have been aware of it) shared a Seventh-day Adventist history.⁸⁷ This voluminous collection of channeled communications originated with a small group of disaffected ex-Adventists who were related, intellectually and often biologically, to the head of the Battle

Creek Sanitarium and discoverer of flaked cereals, John Harvey Kellogg. They included William S. Sadler, an ordained Adventist minister who had earned an M.D. degree at Kellogg's American Medical Missionary College (AMMC) and gone on to establish a prominent psychiatric practice in Chicago; his wife, Lena Kellogg Sadler, a daughter of Kellogg's half-brother Smith Kellogg and also a graduate of the AMMC; her sister Anna Belle Kellogg, a Battle Creek-trained nurse; and Anna's husband and first cousin, Wilfred Kellogg, who was the son of John Harvey Kellogg's older sister Emma and an employee of Kellogg Company, the cereal business owned by his uncle W. K. Kellogg.

William Sadler, the leader of the band, had left the Adventist church some time after the dramatic 1907 excommunication of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg.⁸⁸ Early the year before, Ellen White had become aware that certain doctors and ministers in Battle Creek were raising embarrassing questions about the validity of her testimonies. In a nighttime "vision," she saw the faces of many of her critics, including Drs. Kellogg and Sadler. "I was directed by the Lord to request them, and any others who have perplexities and grievous things in their minds regarding the testimonies that I have borne, to specify what their objections and criticisms are," she related, adding that the Lord had also promised to help her answer their queries.⁸⁹ Kellogg refused to reply, but Sadler obliged White by sending in a long list of "perplexities." For Sadler, the "most serious of all the difficulties"

concerning the testimonies was her son Willie's alleged influence over them, a control his brother, Edson, had confirmed to Sadler.⁹⁰ Instead of answering their perplexities, as she had promised the Lord would help her to do, Mrs. White remained silent, saying only that "a messenger from heaven" had directed her "not to take the burden of picking up and answering all the sayings and doubts that are being put into many minds."⁹¹ Her refusal only exacerbated the growing denominational split in Battle Creek.

In 1911 Sadler spent two months in Europe, allegedly studying psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud and other prominent analysts, though this now seems unlikely.⁹² Regardless, Sadler increasingly practiced psychiatry, writing a number of books on the topic. He devoted one bestseller, *The Mind at Mischief*, to exposing various "fraudulent mediums" and "self-deceived psychics."⁹³ At the end of the book, however, Sadler added a note acknowledging having met one "trance medium," undoubtedly the unnamed Ellen White, who seemed to be genuine, as did another subject whom he had observed for 18 years, recording "probably 250" encounters with extraterrestrials. This second authentic psychic was certainly his brother-in-law Wilfred Kellogg.

The anonymous publication of these celestial revelations, called *The Urantia Book*, occurred in 1955. In a foreword attributed to an unnamed "Orvonton Divine Counselor, Chief of the Corps of Superuniverse

Personalities assigned to portray on Urantia the truth concerning the Paradise Deities and the universe of universes," the author revealed that the word *Urantia* was the cosmic name for planet Earth. As the Divine Counselor explained to mortal readers: "Your world, Urantia, is one of many similar inhabited planets which comprise the local universe of *Nebadon*. This universe, together with similar creations, makes up the superuniverse of *Orvonton*, from whose capital, Uversa, our commission hails. Orvonton is one of the seven evolutionary superuniverses of time and space which circle the never-beginning, never-ending creation of divine perfection—the central universe of *Havona*. At the heart of this eternal and central universe is the stationary Isle of Paradise, the geographic center of infinity and the dwelling place of the eternal God."⁹⁴

Following more than 2,000 pages of messages from the Divine Counselor, the Universal Censor, the Perfector of Wisdom, the Mighty Messenger, the One High in Authority, the One Without Name and Number, the Chief of Archangels, the Vorondalek Son, the Brilliant Evening Star, Melchizedek, the Midwayer Commission and other contributors, this mélange of science, philosophy, and religion concluded with an extensive tribute to Jesus of Nazareth.

The late Martin Gardner, briefly a Seventh-day Adventist himself, devoted years to exploring the origins of *The Urantia Book*, especially its connections to Adventism.⁹⁵ In

the end he concluded that the “UB’s doctrines are a strange blend of Seventh-day Adventist opinions and Adventist heresies.” Among various parallels he emphasized two distinctive Adventist beliefs that also appear in *The Urantia Book*, “the doctrines of soul sleeping and the denial of hell.” He also noted: “In both the UB and Sister White’s books, intelligences on other worlds ... are constantly watching earth’s history with intense interest.” We can only wonder whether John Fetzer, too, detected the echoes of youthful beliefs as he read *The Urantia Book*.

John Fetzer died in 1991, having risen during the previous decade to a spot on the *Forbes Magazine* list of the 400 richest Americans.⁹⁶ Nearly three decades earlier, he had invested much of his wealth in the Fetzer Foundation (later Institute), dedicated to studying the metaphysical roots of the world’s most critical issues. As he confided to Robert F. Lehman, incoming president of the institute in 1989, his belief in past lives had motivated him to establish the institute. “His purpose,” Lehman explained, “was to help bring about the age of the Archangel Michael [one of the Ascended Masters, with whom Fetzer occasionally communicated] and the age of Freedom of Spirit. He believed he had been reincarnated over many lifetimes for this purpose. He felt that this lifetime was his last chance for success. Many spiritual guides in the past had confirmed this to him.”⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, given Fetzer’s own interests, the institute provided considerable support for parapsychological research.⁹⁸ **AT**

¹ This essay was suggested and supported by the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I am especially indebted to Bruce Fetzer, Louis Leeburg, Tom Beaver, and Jimyo L. Ferworn. I owe Brian Wilson of Western Michigan University a special debt for sharing his unparalleled knowledge of John Fetzer.

² W. A. Westworth, “Indiana Conference: News Notes,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 10 (Nov. 6, 1918), pp. 1-2. For assistance in identifying White, who suffered from influenza in the spring of 1919, I am indebted to Benjamin Baker of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research; General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; Silver Spring, Maryland.

³ The most useful full biography of Fetzer is Carol Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer: Stories of One Man’s Search* (2004), which mentions the Fetzers’ Methodism on p. 25.

⁴ An obituary of Claude L. White appeared in *Columbia Union Visitor*, vol. 63 (Oct. 16, 1958), p. 11.

⁵ Olla Titus, “Emmanuel Missionary College Broadcasts,” *Youth’s Instructor*, vol. 72 (March 25, 1924), pp. 4, 14, quotation on p. 4.

⁶ See “Wabash Valley Sanitarium Big,” *Indiana Reporter*, vol. 14 (March 4, 1908), pp. 1-2, reprinted from the *Lafayette Morning Journal*, Feb. 8, 1908; and *Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions: The Fifty-sixth Annual Statistical Report, Year Ending December 31, 1918* (1918), p. 10. The best study of Fetzer’s spiritual journey is Brian C. Wilson, *John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age* (2018).

⁷ See Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (1987).

⁸ Ellen G. White, “To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God,” broadside dated Jan. 31, 1849, Topsham, Maine.

⁹ See Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, 3rd ed. (2008), originally published by Harper and Row in 1976; and Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (2014).

¹⁰ See Eric T. Carlson, “Charles Poyen Brings Mesmerism to America,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science*, vol. 15 (1960), pp. 121-132; and Robert Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (1982).

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2 (1860), p. 62.

¹² Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (1997), p. 102.

¹³ R. Laurence Moore, “The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 27 (1975), p. 202. On the history of spiritualism in America, see Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (1977); and Moore, “Spiritualism,” *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (1974), pp. 79-103.

¹⁴ White, “The Cause in the East,” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (1855), p. 421; Numbers,

Prophetess of Health, pp. 61-68, 190.

¹⁵ White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* vol. 1, no. 3 (August 1849), p. 21.

¹⁶ White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (1851), p. 47.

¹⁷ White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels*, vol. 1 of *Spiritual Gifts* (1858), pp. 173-179. See also White, *Important Facts of Faith, Laws of Health and Testimonies Nos. 1-10*, vol. 4 of *Spiritual Gifts* (1864), pp. 102-104.

¹⁸ White, “Shall We Consult Spiritualist Physicians?” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (1889), p. 193.

¹⁹ White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: During the Christian Dispensation* (1888), p. 553.

²⁰ White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, p. 48.

²¹ White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (1888), p. 512; White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (1875), p. 363.

²² Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*, pp. 253-262. See also Richard W. Schwarz, *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.* (1970).

²³ Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*, pp. 344-401.

²⁴ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, p. 8.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶ Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, pp. 40, 42.

²⁷ Titus, “Emmanuel Missionary College Broadcasts,” pp. 4, 14.

²⁸ See Emmett K. Vande Vere, *The Wisdom Seekers* (1972).

²⁹ Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, p. 43.

³⁰ H. L. Pearson, “Emmanuel Missionary College,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 14 (Sept. 20, 1922), pp. 11-12. See also Pearson, “College Notes,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 14 (Oct. 4, 1922), p. 12; and Pearson, “College Notes,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 15 (April 4, 1923), p. 12.

³¹ “Emmanuel Missionary College Notes,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 15 (July 25, 1923), p. 12. See also “Emmanuel Missionary College Items,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 15 (May 9, 1923), p. 12.

³² Lyndon L. Skinner, “The Third Angel’s Message by Radio,” *Youth’s Instructor*, vol. 71 (Aug. 28, 1923), p. 7.

³³ “WEMC: The Jazzless Radio Station,” *Signs of the Times*, vol. 53 (Nov. 16, 1926), p. 16.

³⁴ F. A. Stahl, “The Schools of the Prophets,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, vol. 103 (Dec. 2, 1926), pp. 17-18.

³⁵ C. F. Clarke, “W8AZ to WKZO,” ca. Sept. 16, 1993, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ “Emmanuel Missionary College,” *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 19 (Jan. 12, 1927), p. 8.

³⁸ Allen Forester, “The Radio Lighthouse,” Senior Paper, 1994, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University. The author used EMC Board Minutes and information published in the *Student Movement* to reconstruct the history of the radio station.

³⁹ W. A. Westworth, “Radio and Our Message,” *The*

Ministry, vol. 1 (November 1928), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰ Clarke, "First Radio Lessons," *Advent Review*, vol. 165 (Feb. 11, 1988), p. 138. See also John E. Fetzer, "Suggestions for Turning in WEMC," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 18 (Dec. 22, 1926), pp. 8-9.

⁴¹ For obituaries of Rhea's parents, see *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 31 (Dec. 12, 1939), p. 13 (father); and *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 52 (July 5, 1960), p. 11 (mother).

⁴² Thomas Thinnis and Kaye Averitt [Collins], transcript of interview with John Fetzer, Dec. 3, 1982, Fetzer Institute Archives.

⁴³ John Fetzer to Rhea Yeager, June 23, 1926, Fetzer Family Papers, Fetzer Institute Archives. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence is from this collection.

⁴⁴ John Fetzer to Rhea Yeager, July 1, 1925.

⁴⁵ Lulu Butler, "Emmanuel Missionary College," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 18 (July 28, 1926), p. 16.

⁴⁶ Thinnis and Averitt, interview with John Fetzer.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* See also Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, expanded ed. (2006), *passim*.

⁴⁸ Thinnis and Averitt, interview with John Fetzer.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Della Frances Fetzer to John Fetzer, March 30, 1925.

⁵² C. Fred Clarke to Karen Spruill, Sept. 16, 1993, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University. See also Clarke, "W8AZ to WKZO."

⁵³ Thinnis and Averitt, interview with John Fetzer.

⁵⁴ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁵ "Emmanuel Missionary College," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 19 (June 1, 1927), pp. 14-16.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, cf. Numbers, *The Creationists*, pp. 148-153, 254-256, 320-327.

⁵⁷ John E. Fetzer, "Faith of Our Fathers," May 11, 1927, Fetzer Family Papers, Fetzer Institute Archives.

⁵⁸ "Emmanuel Missionary College Notes," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 19 (May 18, 1927), p. 8.

⁵⁹ "Emmanuel Missionary College," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 20 (June 13, 1928), p. 16.

⁶⁰ Della Frances Fetzer to John Fetzer, July 26, 1928.

⁶¹ Della Frances Fetzer to John Fetzer, Aug. 12, 1928.

⁶² Rhea Fetzer to John Fetzer, Oct. 14, 1928; *Year Books of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination, 1927-1930*.

⁶³ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 19-20. The "John E. Fetzer Timeline" at www.fetzertrust.org says that he left the church in 1928, which seems unlikely in any formal sense.

⁶⁴ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 21-23, which provides long excerpts from Slater's letter to Fetzer. See also D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith* (1888).

⁶⁵ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 24-28.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 23 (Della Frances Fetzer to John Fetzer, Aug. 12, 1928).

⁶⁷ Della Frances Fetzer to John and Rhea Fetzer, June 30, 1930.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, Sept. 17, 1930 (astrology); Sept. 25, 1930 (spiritualism); Oct. 17, 1930 (quote).

⁶⁹ Thinnis and Averitt, interview with John Fetzer, Dec. 3, 1982.

⁷⁰ Forester, "The Radio Lighthouse."

⁷¹ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, p. 32.

⁷² Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, p. 64 (mysticism), pp. 134, 136-137, 148 (Masonry).

⁷³ A timeline in John E. Fetzer, *America's Agony* (2007), p. 74, asserts that in 1924 Fetzer attended "meetings at Camp Chesterfield sponsored by Indiana Association of Spiritualists." Because this was the very height of his commitment to Adventism, it seems more likely that he began meeting the Indiana spiritualists a decade later, as implied by the "John E. Fetzer Timeline" at www.fetzertrust.org. In his exhaustive study of Fetzer's spiritual quest, *John E. Fetzer*, Brian C. Wilson (p. 41) sets the date at 1934.

⁷⁴ See White, *Should Christians Be Members of Secret Societies?* (1893); White, *Evangelism* (1946), pp. 617-620; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 4 (1985), pp. 49-56; and Denton E. Rebok, *Believe His Prophets* (1956), pp. 123-135.

⁷⁵ E. G. White, Letter 21, 1893, *Selected Messages: Book 2* (1959), p. 140.

⁷⁶ Numbers, *The Creationists*, pp. 286-296.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 232-233. According to Wilson, pp. 284-286, Fetzer also worked with former Adventist and Andrews University student Joey Jochmans, a self-described "spiritual anthropologist" and student of the paranormal. Jochmans, in turn, collaborated with the controversial SDA writer Rene Noorbergen, author of such books as *Secrets of the Lost Races: New Discoveries of Advanced Technology in Ancient Civilizations*, Researched by Joey R. Jochmans (1977); *Jeanne Dixon: My Life and Prophecies: Her Own Story as Told to Rene Noorbergen* (1969); and *Ellen G. White, Prophet of Destiny* (1972).

⁷⁸ One of Ellen G. White's earliest allusions to guardian angels appeared in *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2 (1860), p. 51. See also E. G. White, "Our Words—No. 1," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, vol. 75 (1898), pp. 37-38.

⁷⁹ Michael C. Gergely, prelude to Fetzer, *America's Agony* (2007), p. i, the main text of which first appeared in Fetzer, *The Men from Wengen and America's Agony* (1971).

⁸⁰ "Donation of Radio Equipment Enlarges WAUR," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 60 (July 2, 1968), p. 16; "Andrews University," *Review and Herald*, vol. 149 (June 15, 1972), p. 22; and "Fetzer Donates Vintage Radio Equipment to WAUS," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 67 (Dec. 16, 1975), p. 16. See also "Homecoming Day Brings 300 from 15 States," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 61 (May 20, 1969), p. 15; Adrian M. Peterson, "SDA Broadcasting Celebrates Its Sixtieth Anniversary," *Adventist Review*, vol. 160 (July 28, 1983), p. 17; and Peterson, "Adventists Celebrate 70 Years in Radio," *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 85 (December 1993), p. 7. In "This I Believe," an undated manuscript in the Fetzer Archives,

John Fetzer mentioned elliptically that he had "had exposure to strong fundamental religious teaching"

⁸¹ "Augsburger Tells Graduates 'to Soar,'" *Lake Union Herald*, vol. 72 (June 17, 1980), p. 6.

⁸² Fetzer, "This I Believe"

⁸³ Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁴ Fetzer, "This I Believe" (Dixon); Fetzer, *America's Agony*, p. 80 (Mitchell); Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, pp. 134-140 (influences).

⁸⁵ Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, pp. 152-153.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 126-129. See also Fetzer, *One Man's Family: A History and Genealogy of the Fetzer Family* (1964); and Fetzer, *The Men from Wengen and America's Agony* (1971).

⁸⁷ Fetzer, *America's Agony*, p. 90. For a nonapologetic history of *The Urantia Book*, see Martin Gardner, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* (1995).

⁸⁸ On Kellogg's and Sadler's breaks with the Adventist church, see Numbers, *Prophets of Health*, pp. 354-361. See also Schwarz, "John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1964), pp. 347-417, which includes documentation left out of the published version; and Schwarz, "The Kellogg Schism: The Hidden Issues," *Spectrum*, vol. 4 (Autumn 1972), pp. 23-39.

⁸⁹ E. G. White, Letter 120 (March 30, 1906).

⁹⁰ Regarding Sadler, see also G. Vonne Meussling, "William S. Sadler: Chautauqua's Medic Orator" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1970), which does not discuss his connection with the Urantia movement.

⁹¹ E. G. White, Manuscript 61 (June 3, 1906).

⁹² Marc Demarest, "Sidebar: Testable Facts," April 29, 2011, at <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2011/04/sidebar-testable-facts.html>.

⁹³ William S. Sadler, *The Mind at Mischief: Tricks and Deceptions of the Subconscious and How to Cope with Them* (1929), pp. 382-384.

⁹⁴ *The Urantia Book* (1955), pp. 1, 17.

⁹⁵ Gardner, pp. 45-48, 104-109, 225-253, quotations on p. 226.

⁹⁶ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, p. ix.

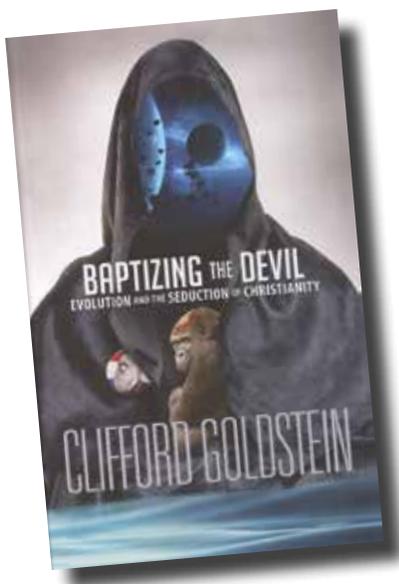
⁹⁷ Hegedus, *John Earl Fetzer*, p. 217; On Fetzer's occasional communications with the Archangel Michael, see Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 268-269, 271.

⁹⁸ Wilson, *John E. Fetzer*, pp. 125-152

How an Apologist for Traditional Adventism Misunderstands Science

By Ervin Taylor

Clifford Goldstein, *Baptizing the Devil: Evolution and the Seduction of Christianity* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 256 pages.



My good friend Clifford Goldstein is, if nothing else, a consistent apologist for a type of traditional Seventh-day Adventism being espoused by the current General Conference administration. In my view, he is one of the best populist apologists for classical Adventism currently writing for a general audience of Adventist believers in the English-speaking world. That Goldstein and I disagree on almost every point of Adventist theology, as well as a number of general points of Christian theology, is really beside the point. In many respects, he is a happy warrior in the service of traditional Adventist orthodoxy.

As far as I can make out, Goldstein's basic thesis in *Baptizing the Devil* is that, in his opinion, the Bible and Christianity—especially the Adventist version of Christianity—are completely

incompatible with a belief in biological evolution over long geological ages. As is characteristic of much of his writings, he never considers the fact that he is assuming that *his* interpretation of the Bible, *his* views concerning Christianity, and *his* version of Adventism are the true ones. While we all do that in some ways, with Goldstein there seem to be no gray zones, only binary total absolute Truths or total absolute Errors. There is no middle ground and little room for discussion.

Goldstein claims that most Christians—including some Adventists who are named—are intimidated by the statement: “But it’s science!” On the last page, he writes, “Why have good people ... so readily placed their faith on something so speculative, so contingent and contrary to Scripture as evolutionary events that supposedly occurred millions, even billions of years out of our reach?” The answer seems obvious to him: “Despite the absurdities, flaws, and billion-years leaps of inductive faith that underpin evolutionary theory, *it’s science!*” (p. 255). According to Goldstein, “It’s science” has been the vehicle to convince most of the contemporary Christian world—and an increasing number of Adventists with graduate-level scientific education—that the teachings of Christianity are compatible with a belief in biological changes in plants and animals, including the human animal, over millions and billions of years of geologic time.

Let us briefly consider a few aspects of what Goldstein has written about what is, to him, this regrettable state of affairs.

Galileo and the Church

Any discussion of this topic seems to require at least a nod in the direction

of the Galileo vs. the Holy Office (the Inquisition) struggle of the 16th-century Roman Catholic Church. In a chapter titled “Galileo’s Heresy,” Goldstein provides readers with what I am sure will be, to some, a surprising interpretation of what was the central issue in the Galileo affair. In Goldstein’s view, the beliefs that the medieval church was *really* defending were not primarily the church’s interpretation of Scripture. If not the medieval church’s interpretation of Holy Writ, then a reader might ask, what dogma was the church defending? According to Goldstein, it was “the authority of science” (p. 20). This is, if may I be permitted to say, a highly creative interpretation, and you will have to read it for yourself to see how he comes to it.

It would take a long discussion to unpack how complex were the issues that separated Galileo’s ideas from and the teachings of the medieval church. Galileo is quoted as saying, “The Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.” (He elsewhere gives credit for the phrase to a friend.) Defending the authority of science was, at best, a very minor aspect of why the church made such a big deal about Galileo’s publications.

The Human Factor

In a chapter called “Mind and Cosmos,” Goldstein wades into the deep waters of philosophy, including epistemology. This branch of philosophy considers the basis on which we say we “know” something. He says that humans are “not granted unmediated access to reality.” He quotes the English philosopher Thomas Nagel: “We can’t get outside of ourselves completely. Whatever we do, we remain subparts of the world with limited access to the real nature of the rest of it and of ourselves” (p. 44).

Most reflective individuals are fully aware of the regrettable fact that we humans do not have the capacity to comprehend the “real” nature of whatever “reality” is. But that has never been the central issue. The question is what approach or strategy permits humans to draw the most accurate conclusions possible about how one part of reality, which we call the natural world, works. It is my observation that most educated individuals in the modern Western world, including Christians, agree that science has developed the best methods for accomplishing this.

The obvious truth is that humans engaged in scientific pursuits have strong egos and defend their own cherished beliefs. However, the collective discipline of science has devised strategies to increase the chances of breaking through the biases of a particular individual or group. In general, I would argue that the best methodologies we currently have for obtaining accurate data about the physical world are those of science.

About Science

Science is, of course, Goldstein’s main target in *Baptizing the Devil*—admittedly a catchy title. After reading just a few pages in a few chapters, however, those who have engaged in scientific research will quickly conclude that Goldstein simply does not understand the nature of modern science. What might be the reason for this?

First, Goldstein quotes primarily philosophers and historians *about* science. Strangely, he dips heavily into that literature while citing only a few scientists writing about the nature of science.

Second, Goldstein totally ignores what is central to a broad-based understanding of the scientific evidence concerning the evolution of life forms on this planet,

which he says is his major concern. That issue is *time* or, to be specific, *geological time*. He seems to have no awareness of the basis on which the modern geological and paleontological time scale has been developed.

To state it explicitly, the author seems oblivious to the manner in which the current scientific understandings of the chronology of Earth history—the age of our planet and life forms on it—has developed, especially over the last half-century. He appears to not understand the nature of scientific data, which are used in the development of contemporary geochronology. He also exhibits no evidence of knowing that the data supporting the current geological time scale have nothing in common with the database and approach of biologists in the study of biological evolution.

Third, Goldstein seems to have a strong aversion, amounting to openly expressed hostility and animus, to the modern Western worldview. Despite the inroads of postmodernist understandings, many aspects of our contemporary worldview continue to reflect a modernist set of assumptions that began to be expressed during the 16th-century Enlightenment. These were accepted widely, first in the West and then in other parts of the world. And of course, one of the major components of the modern Western worldview is that science is the best way to study the physical world.

Goldstein’s distaste for the major intellectual and cultural components of our modern world were expressed in a recent (June 9, 2018) “Cliff’s Edge” column published in the *Adventist Review*. There he decries what happens “when people accept the great myth of the modern era, which is that scientific pronouncements trump all other forms of knowledge, including revelation.”

What he appears not to understand about the nature of modern science is that science-based statements do not address metaphysical issues. They make no claim about the nature of existential or metaphysical reality as conceptualized philosophically or theologically. Science-based statements provide answers *only* to questions about how *the natural world works*. Science has evolved using data obtainable only from the study of the material world, which is, in principle, publicly accessible. Information from any kind of “revelation” contained in a holy book, or from the mystical experiences of a private individual, cannot be used to engage in scientific studies.

Those are the rules. If you don’t like those rules, you may wish to play another game, such as theology or philosophy. But you are mischaracterizing science if you suppose its purpose is to supplant all other discussions of truth or meaning.

A Pre-Modern Worldview

In conclusion, it appears to this observer that the author of this book has shot himself in his intellectual foot. He rejects a basic idea that constitutes one of the central pillars of the modern worldview: that the methods of science are *the only way to understand how the material world works*. I am forced to conclude that Goldstein’s worldview is pre-modern at its core and would, I suspect, feel more at home in Europe during the 11th century CE or, for that matter, in Palestine of the 11th century BCE.

Understanding this about Clifford Goldstein goes a long way toward explaining why the book he authored about science is so misguided, and why he rejects established scientific conclusions about the origins of life, the universe, and everything else in it. **AT**



Sanctification by Senility

By Alden Thompson

If my memory is correct, the phrase “sanctification by senility” comes from Charles Wittschiebe, a teacher of pastoral care when I was a seminary student at Andrews University. As he used the phrase, it referred to the diminishing passions (and temptations!) that come with advancing years. But here I am almost turning it on its head, using it to refer to life-changing insights that are a long time in coming.

My key examples come from my own experience and from the experience of Ellen White, and there is an important link between the two. Unfortunately, many Adventists feel so oppressed by the voluminous writings of Ellen White that they can’t see that link. And because of the difficulty devout conservatives have in dealing with “change,” the church has rarely exploited the great advantage these writings provide us in pinpointing those *Aha!* moments when “the penny dropped” or “the lights came on” for Ellen White. For that purpose, however, her writings are potentially a monumental treasure for us.

No Adventist would mistake my experience as having anything close to prophetic authority, so my story does not have the same oppressive potential as Ellen White’s. But the intersection between our experiences lies in this: just as my experience illustrates how at least one believer relates to crucial issues of faith, so Ellen White’s experience can illustrate for us how an inspired writer relates to similar issues over the course of a long life. And for that purpose, I like the phrase “illustrative authority” for describing her role. Her life and writings illustrate how God has worked over time without mandating an immediate and absolute application of her words to our lives. Such an approach takes the steam out of the phrase, “But Sister White says.” No longer can she bring discussions to a close.

To envision the idea of *illustrative* authority in place of *absolute* authority is likely to be unsettling for some, because it would seem to subtly (or not-so-subtly!) undermine prophetic authority. Yet in real life, we almost never find a one-to-one, absolute match between a statement from the Bible or from Ellen White that fully matches our circumstances. Where can I go, for example, in either the Bible or the writings of Ellen White, to know precisely what I should say and what I should leave unsaid in the writing of this article? I’ve written about this elsewhere so will not belabor the point here, but I face the same issue in the classroom, in the pulpit, and in personal conversations. All I have are *illustrations* from the Bible and from Ellen White—and an invitation to seek the guidance of the Spirit so that I can somehow apply them in a way that would be pleasing to God and helpful to other people. With such an approach, every passage of inspired writings remains alive, a ready illustration to use when the Spirit guides. We never throw anything away. We never know when we might actually need a verse or a passage that we thought was irrelevant.

The title of one of my books points in the direction of illustrative authority: *Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White Grew from Fear to Joy—and Helped Me Do It Too* (Pacific Press, 2005). In that connection, my *Aha!* moment came when I was reading her autobiography in the first volume of *Testimonies for the Church* (pp. 9-112) and almost fell off my chair when she described her initial reaction to her mother’s suggestion that there was no eternally burning hell. She wrote: “‘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.’”

What startled me was the sharp contrast between that 1840s fear of losing hell and her “mature” horror of hell in the 1880s, as described in *The Great Controversy*: “The errors of popular theology have driven many a soul to skepticism who might otherwise have been a believer in the Scriptures. It is impossible for him to accept doctrines which

I realized that what had kept me from opening up to the Scots was the subconscious conviction that they must accept the Sabbath in order to be saved.

outrage his sense of justice, mercy, and benevolence; and since these are represented as the teaching of the Bible, he refuses to receive it as the word of God.” Her extensive writings allow us to document the steps by which she made that 180-degree move. And it did not happen immediately.

But now to some other *Aha!* moments, both hers and mine. I once wrote an article titled, “I Was 23 When I Saw the Light.” It described one of the most important of my *Aha!* moments, the discovery that Jesus was God incarnate. When I was at seminary (1965-1967), I found myself tussling with an urgent question: “If the Father loves me, why do I need a mediator?” So, in my second year at Andrews University, I elected to address that question in a seminar and discovered John 14-17. In particular, these words of Jesus found their mark: “Whoever has

seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, NRSV).

I was ecstatic! If God cared enough about me to take on human flesh and come to Earth, he surely must want me in his kingdom. I had used all of the right words: Jesus was “divine,” he was the “son of God.” But the truth of those words did not strike home until I was 23 years old. I soon discovered that some of my friends had already seen the light. Why had it taken me so long?

The short answer: The deadly but often erratic effects of sin on humanity.

Another *Aha!* for me came after our stay in Scotland for my doctoral studies (1972-1974). When we got back to the States, both my wife and I found ourselves regretting that we had not gotten to know the Scottish people better. I finally stumbled onto the reason for our hesitancy when I was reading Ellen White’s commentary on the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46) in *The Desire of Ages*. This is the paragraph that gripped me: “Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”

Ellen White's
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mandating
an immediate
and absolute
application
of her words
to our lives.

Aha! If God can save even the heathen who have never heard the name of Jesus, he can surely save our Scottish friends without our having to confront them with Adventist “distinctives.” I realized that what had kept me from opening up to the Scots was the subconscious conviction that they must accept the Sabbath in order to be saved. The pressure from that conviction blocked my wife and me from establishing real relationships with them.

We vowed that we would return to Scotland and ask the Lord to give us another try. We did, and he did. We returned to Scotland with eagerness, joy, and a readiness to engage with our Scottish friends without the burden of feeling that we “had to convert them.” As a result we made lasting friendships with Presbyterians, Plymouth Brethren, Christian Science believers, and atheists.

But here is what struck me recently: That 1898 quotation in *The Desire of Ages* was written by Ellen White when she was 71 years old. You’ll find nothing remotely like it in any of her earlier writings. Why did it take her so long to see the light? Because of the deadly but often erratic effects of sin on humanity.

And here is yet another reflection on that same 1898 quotation. It was there all along in my library, in a book I had long treasured. But I didn’t really “hear” the statement until the late 1970s. Why had it taken me so long? Because of the deadly but often erratic effects of sin on humanity.

I should also note that somewhere along the line I discovered that Ellen White herself had urged her fellow believers *not* to use Adventist distinctives as the opening wedge in their witness to others. She wrote: “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.”

Ellen White’s own attitudes were no doubt shaped by the realization of how long it had taken her to gain certain insights. In the context of her struggles to adopt health reform, for example, she wrote these astonishing words in 1872—a quote with far-reaching implications and applications: “We must go no faster than we can take those with us whose consciences and intellects are convinced of the truths we advocate. We must meet the people where they are. Some of us have been many years in arriving at our present position in health reform. It is slow work to obtain a reform in diet. We have powerful appetites to meet; for the world is given to gluttony. If we should allow the people as much time as we have required to come up to the present advanced state in reform, we would be very patient with them, and allow them to advance step by step, as we have done, until their feet are firmly established upon the health reform platform. But we should be very cautious not to advance too fast, lest we be obliged to retrace our steps. In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. And if there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people.”

In short, when I am tempted to be impatient with people for not “believing” more quickly, I find it both helpful and sobering to think of how long it took both me and Ellen White to adopt new positions.

But if the church is to benefit from all of this, Adventists will need to see Ellen White as an *illustrative* authority, not as the last word. Then, with the pressure off, we can come together, comparing our experiences and hers. Together we can grow toward the kingdom with joy. But all of that will take time. “We must go no faster than we can take those with us whose consciences and intellects are convinced of the truth we advocate.” **AT**

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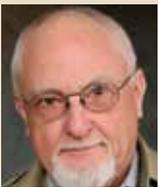
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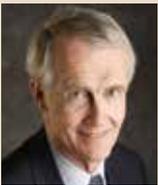
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Adventist Today

Editorial *continued from page 3*

positive things. We don't make reality; we simply try to report it in a balanced and straightforward manner. We attempt to put it into context and give enough background so that readers can understand what it means in terms of the trends underway.

Covering up bad news does not strengthen the church. Look at the current crisis in the Catholic Church. A long practice of coverups has not increased the trust people have in their clergy. In fact, it has damaged that trust even for pastors

who have done no wrong and has made it impossible for the faithful to know whom they can trust. Adventists, of all people, should not repeat the mistakes of the Catholic hierarchy.

At the same time, it is important to say that the purpose of *Adventist Today* is not to make the leadership of the Adventist denomination look bad or to attack it. Most of the men and women in leadership are good people, dedicated to doing God's work and to caring for God's people, and we support them. We are especially interested in stories about congregations, ministries, and institutions

that are doing something creative or innovative to deal with contemporary realities. We seek to communicate an inclusive, compassionate, grace-oriented, hopeful, and Christ-centered Adventist faith.

If you believe in what we are trying to do, please help us. If you know of a story that needs to be told, contact us. If you hear a sermon or see an article that should be considered for publication, send it to us. Become a "member," a part of the network of supporters who help fund this ministry of journalism. Pray for us—that we will do journalism in a way that honors God and His purposes. **AT**



NEWS BRIEFS

Oversight Committee to Watch George Knight

SILVER SPRING, Md. — A new addition has been made to a list of recently formed oversight committees at the General Conference (GC). These committees address critical issues including Sabbath wading, disruptive church snoring, troubled vegans, and Adventist creativity in pinning jewelry on clothing so that it no longer counts as jewelry.

The brand new committee is entirely dedicated to monitoring each and every one of the sermons, editorials, or banned books by Adventist historian George K. Knight. This academic has grown increasingly critical of the GC, likening power grabs by the Adventist denomination's leadership to the behavior of the medieval Roman Catholic Church.

The oversight committee has started its work by asking Knight to voluntarily submit to wearing an ankle monitor

and to refrain from penning any more *Spectrum* magazine articles.

GC Executives Fitted for Nice, Big Crowns

SILVER SPRING, Md. — Members of the General Conference Executive Committee took time out of their busy schedules for a crown fitting this morning. A considerable budget for the crowns was approved late last week by senior leadership. A statement issued by the world church explained that far from being jewelry or signifying worldly adornment, the crowns were instead intended to stress “the royal authority of this august group of leaders.”

General Conference Ego Management Officer Paco Creido said at a press conference that crown fitting is a painstaking exercise that requires exhaustive attention to match the height of each crown to the amount of power each GC leader has been able to amass over the years.

Crown diameter sizing takes even more time, added Creido. “Although we measure the heads of all members of the GC Executive Committee as soon as they are elected to their posts, we have had a lot of rework to do. More than a few heads have swelled considerably.”

World Church Mandates Pre-Sabbath Baths

SILVER SPRING, Md. — Effective immediately, all baptized members of the Adventist Church will be required to take pre-Sabbath baths. The new policy was announced this morning by the General Conference as part of a push “toward unity in Sabbath etiquette.” Adventists around the world have been told to draw their baths at least an hour before sunset every Friday.

To encourage the habit, Adventist Book Center stores will carry a line of pre-Sabbath bath ducks sold at cost. The bath toys have been programmed to squawk out periodic reminders of how much time is left before Friday sunset. If an Adventist is still in the bath five minutes before nightfall, the bath duck will emit a mild electric shock to speed up the process.

Adventist Credit Card Won't Work on Sabbath

SILVER SPRING, Md. — An Adventist VISA card with some unique features was launched today. The credit card, which is available exclusively through Adventist Book Center (ABC) stores, was introduced to discourage church members from going out to eat during Sabbath hours.

“Our credit card is designed so that charges will be automatically denied if it is used between Friday sunset and Saturday sunset,” said Pam Flett, the ABC spokesperson. “If you try to use your Adventist credit card on Sabbath,” she added, “your pastor will be notified.”

Anyone who signs up for an Adventist VISA card will be entitled to weekday half-off pricing on carob chip cookies, “which just about every ABC store is trying to get rid of anyway,” Flett observed.

When asked by a reporter if debt carried on the credit card would be forgiven every seventh year, per Old Testament Jewish custom, Flett responded by adding the journalist's name to a black notebook listing individuals whose application for the new card would be inevitably rejected.

BarelyAdventist (barelyadventist.com) is a satire and humor blog on Adventist culture and issues. It is written by committed Adventists who have no interest in tearing down the church but don't mind laughing at our idiosyncrasies.

Torkelsen *continued from page 11*

council's injunction, "You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15:29, NIV). To the church in Corinth, Paul warned against making food sacrificed to idols an issue. He simply states: "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do" (1 Cor. 8:8, ESV). Idols do not exist, he added, but take care and show regard for your friends' weak conscience. Obviously love for God and your neighbor mandates *flexibility and diversity* and trumps authoritarian pronouncements.

From San Antonio Back to Jerusalem

What if we would leave San Antonio and journey back to Jerusalem? A healing process can begin if we simply stop calling each other "rebels" and "apostates."¹⁸ I have seen Adventists—even leaders among us—exclude from the remnant those with whom they disagree. Some have suggested that they look forward to and pray for the coming of the shaking that will rid us of these rebels. Why all of this harsh animosity toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, simply because of differences in understanding on a point of practical organization for mission? I fear that the attitudes displayed in this manner are a far greater danger to the mission of our church than whatever opinion we have regarding this bone of contention.

What if we would instead admit the possibility that our own personal reading of the Word of God is not necessarily as clear as we think it is? Rather than looking through the culturally and hermeneutically foggy glasses on our own nose, we then would give the Holy Spirit a fair chance to lead us to a more coherent, more inclusive, and even more just and righteous understanding of the Word.

I question no one's sincerity. We are all struggling to understand and do our best. But sincerity is no proof of right thinking, nor of wisdom and sound judgment. Christ pointed out that the fruits of our labor will indicate its quality, not our claim to biblical correctness.

What drives us to beat each other while we are waiting for our Master to return (Matt. 24:28-29)? If we allow internal disputes over minor issues to sidetrack us from proclaiming the eternal gospel embedded in the three angels' messages, Satan will exult in another great success in his efforts of opposing God's redemptive work.

How much longer, O Lord, will you wait for us? **AT**

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1911), p. 448.

² *ibid.*, p. 445.

³ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Pelican History of the Church, vol. 1 (1967), p. 41ff.

⁴ Hans Küng, *Die Frau im Christentum* (2001), pp. 40-41.

⁵ A person found guilty of heresy by a church court was delivered to the civil authorities for "appropriate punishment" (i.e., burning at the stake). Thus the Church could claim that it had never killed anybody. See Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (1955), ch. XIII, p. 413ff.

⁶ See Wikipedia article "Primacy of Peter" and also R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Pelican History of the Church, vol. 2 (1970), ch. 4.

⁷ The struggle between royal and priestly power (*regnum and sacerdotium*) started when Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) launched his reform program, Gregorianism, and lasted until the death of Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303). In this period the theory of papal supremacy was refined. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) confidently stated that he was "less than God but more than man." The bull "*Unam Sanctam*" issued by pope Boniface VIII in 1302 was the capstone of this ideology. See Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (1965), p. 103; cf. Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State: 1050-1300* (1964).

⁸ During the Great Papal Schism (1378-1417), the question of who constituted the "Church" was hotly debated. The pope claimed that only a council called and controlled by the pope was a valid council. In 1460, Pope Pius II condemned the Conciliar Movement as a heresy.

⁹ An Italian monk named Gratian, who is considered father of the study of canon law, compiled several collections of documents

beginning in 1150 CE. He named his collection *Concordia Discordantium Canonum*, or Concord of Discordancies of Canons. More compilations later appeared, and together they made up *the Corpus Iuris Canonici*.

¹⁰ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section on Ordination, 1536-1600.

¹¹ This text is not about hairstyles, clothing, and jewelry *per se*, but about witnessing strategy. Puritans and some Adventists have read into the text a *universal prohibition* against adornment and have arbitrarily singled out "jewelry" as the main target. Tragically, this interpretation has been used to refuse baptism to sincere and committed souls, thereby placing higher value on an arbitrary and questionable interpretation than on the salvation of real persons.

¹² See GCWP Section L35 as an example.

¹³ George R. Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptation* (2017); cf. William G. Johnsson, *Where Are We Headed? Adventism After San Antonio* (2017).

¹⁴ David Larson, "Triggering Public Reprimands: Simple Majorities Are Not Enough," *Spectrum Magazine* web edition (Aug. 3, 2018).

¹⁵ Barry Oliver, "Reorganisation of Church Structures, 1901-03: Some Observations," presented at the 2017 London Unity Conference (June 15, 2017).

¹⁶ The General Conference document *Unity in Mission: Procedures in Church Reconciliation* (Oct. 6, 2016) describes procedures to effect "reconciliation" that include conversations and prayers with union conferences that are considered to be "out of policy." The document offers only one solution: the unions must unconditionally submit to the dictates of the GC policies; if not, serious (unspecified) consequences will be executed. This virtually nullifies the strategic purpose of the document by converting dialog to monolog. According to the analysis of Mitchell Tyner, retired Associate General Counsel to the General Conference, the GC procedures are themselves "out of policy." See Mitchell Tyner, "The Use of General Conference Working Policy in the Case of Unions That Ordain Women," *Spectrum Magazine* web edition (Oct. 10, 2016).

¹⁷ See Mark Finley, "A Divine Movement United in Mission and Message," *General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter* (January 2017). The article's main thrust is to defend *church authority* as understood and applied by the present GC administration. Doing so, Finley overplays obedience to church authority and does not address the real issues that focus on the *limits* of that authority.

¹⁸ I recommend Denis Fortin's article, "Church Governance in Times of Conflict," *Adventist Today* web edition (Aug. 27, 2018). Fortin analyzes our organizational structure and compares it with other denominations. In conclusion he offers several recommendations for change that, if they were implemented, probably would diffuse much of the tension that we experience today and bring us back again to the ideals of the 1901 GC Session.

Trust & Verify

From an early age, your personality has been to explore new ideas and question the status quo.

When a teacher presents new topics as if they are indisputable facts, you trust them as far as you can verify the veracity of their claims. Your inquiring mind compels you to speak up in class, asking searching questions, and prompts you to write papers that challenge commonly held assumptions.

When your employer gives you data to do your work, you appreciate your paycheck and do everything you can to keep getting paid, but you also double-check what you're given to make sure it is accurate, fair, ethical, and truthful.

And when you go to church, you think your pastor is a good person who has compassionately supported you and your family through some difficult life events, but you're not going to take his or her theological pronouncements as gospel. You're going to study them for yourself and draw your own conclusions on any topic of faith.

Adventist Today Is Independent

We think our print and online resources are uniquely tailored to you. Our mission includes a respect for the Adventist community, but we are willing to investigate anything and bring it to light whenever necessary:

- Even if a fundamental belief has been held for centuries, we will seek for present truth and share it with you so that you can come to your own conclusions.
- When a leader at any level bullies, abuses, or assaults children or women or men, we will call it out and bring pressure to bear to resolve those situations.
- When leaders insist on uniformity and demand compliance with loyalty oaths, we will suggest how to resist these power plays.
- When financial spending by the denomination is presented as good for its members, we'll verify those claims and let you know if your trust is well-placed.

We're Worth Supporting

It's easy to think someone else will financially support independent journalism and that your money is not needed. It's easy to think there must be an institution or family foundation that is underwriting Adventist Today. It's easy to think that everything on the internet is free, and there are no associated costs. But as a reader-supported nonprofit organization, we need your continuous support to sustain us.

Independent journalism is needed now more than ever. The issues we need to verify in the Adventist community are increasing every day. And you're counting on Adventist Today staff to be at their best and get the story right. That's why we are asking you to become a member.



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