

ADVENTIST REVIEW

DECEMBER 2018: THIS GLORIOUS TEMPLE + A GIFT FROM THE RIVER + GOD'S SABBATH STAMP + GIVE THE CHURCH AN A + ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS + WHAT WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT TECHNOLOGY



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ADVENTIST REVIEW

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TRENDING

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BILL KNOTT



"You cannot make creationists indoors."

The Place Where I Worship

It's a hard place to be an unbeliever.

At the end of a dirt road high above the Berkshire town of Zoar, there's a metal gate requiring all journeys to this sanctuary be made on foot. The dirt bikes and four-wheelers may not pass, for they are asked, albeit silently, *"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?"* A short climb over what remains of someone's road leads to the grandest view—and the greatest blueberry patch—I've ever known.

I've spent so many hours there, lost in the holy wandering and wondering familiar to anyone who has found the berry patch of the ages. At every turn on any July day, the low-bush berries hang like gems on stems too slender to support their weight.

And then there is the view—a vista grand enough to seize the heart of a 12-year-old and make him whisper to no one in particular but to all of listening heaven—*"Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below."* Ten miles of lovely, folding green hills crowd down around the Deerfield, winding like one of the rivers of Eden through a landscape on which no human mark is visible.

What part of all this moment—sun and sky and lush green hills, berries eaten and uneaten, signs of bears who also love this place—what part of this is owing to mere chance? A dozen textbooks on geology will tell me of the uplift many million years ago that formed this ancient mountain chain. What little I remember from astronomy will plot the sun—by accident, of course—at 93 million miles away, conveniently at just the distance necessary to sustain life—my life—on this small planet. The witness of Darwinians will urge me that the black bears waiting my departure from the blueberry patch are but the ever-slow result of untold years of mindless mutation.

And then there are the blueberries themselves—exploding on the taste buds (whence came these?) of a child able to experience just one of those fruits bearing seed the Father planted in this garden.

For all our wise and thoughtful work to show the science undergirding the Genesis account of how

this world began, we come—at last—upon a fundamental truth. You cannot make creationists indoors, beneath the ghastly glow of long fluorescent tubes, the bunkered basement labs and classrooms where we teach and urge what, in the end, must still be known and sensed and felt and tasted.

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Ps. 8:3, 4, NRSV¹).

The witness of our senses, made by God to apprehend His handiwork and stir us to a hymn of praise, is no less valid than the testimony of our logic. Our arguments from design; our 50 proofs of irreducible complexity, may—at their best—prepare the ground for what must yet become an outdoor faith. The eyes that sweep the nighttime sky; the heart that warms with inexpressible delight at ocean surf and early morning birdsongs—these are the witnesses that make our trust in Genesis more solid than the ablest deductions.

It's no mystery that as our culture has retreated from direct contact with summer heat and winter cold, as we have moved indoors to keep our distance from bears, blueberries, and bougainvillea, we have become, ergo, the greatest things we know, dull worshippers of self and what small things a self can make. When you, and what you do and think, are the largest things you know, creationism will seem a dull and counterfactual employment.

So here's to Sabbaths spent at least in part where we can be what we were formed to be—mere humans in the garden of the Lord. In these deep sanctuaries of grace, we find our true significance, and sing our finest hymns. ♣

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Bill Knott

When I picked up the September issue of *Adventist Review* . . . the headline brought a timely message of hope to my broken heart. Thank you so much.

PHELICIA WYANT, ARPIN, WISCONSIN

A TIMELY MESSAGE

When I picked up the September issue of my *Adventist Review* to put it in my purse, the cover page caught my attention and gratitude. That day, September 8, was the one-year anniversary of my mother's death from acute leukemia. The next day, September 9, was the six-year anniversary of the death of my stepfather. Your headline brought a timely message of hope to my broken heart. Thank you so much.

Phelicia Wyant
Arpin, Wisconsin



about the worldwide use of alcohol (October 2018).

This takes me back to 1953 when we had the first youth congress in Brazil. Five of us were to present oral compositions about the detrimental effects of alcoholism in society. Later on, as a youth and temperance director, I was able to help young people who engage in this terrible vice. Every day we hear in the news the tragedy faced by many parents regarding the effect of alcohol on young people. It is a major factor globally and we must warn our youth that there is no safe level of alcohol use.

As a former General Conference vice president I worked with the Health Department in connection with Duane McBride at Andrews University to help our young people and to make our church aware of this issue. I was happy to read Landless' and McBride's statement that the most vulnerable for alcohol-related consequences are those aged 19-45 years old; it is mandatory to get the facts to youth and younger adults.

I will never forget the story of two brothers from São Paulo,

A USEFUL BOOK?

Regarding the book review for *Food as Medicine: Cooking for Your Best Health* (October 2018), Stephen Chavez gives the link to Amazon Australia. When I went there to order I found a plain statement: "This item cannot be shipped to the United States." It may be a nice book, but Chavez should find a correct and practical way for readers to order

this book in the United States.

Another point: The lowest international postage for a book weighing five pounds was given on the Internet as \$202. This book obviously has to be reprinted in the United States before it can be useful to us.

Herbert E. Perrine
Looneyville, West Virginia

ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE

I appreciated the report "No Safe Level of Alcohol Consumption,"

My wife and I have had the privilege of ministering at the Hiram Edson Farm for the past two seasons. We invite everyone to visit this historic Adventist site in 2019.

JIM EVERHART, CLIFTON SPRINGS, NEW YORK

Brazil. One seen in the gutter consumed with alcohol, and the other worshipping in church. What a joy it was to meet them later on, both side by side praising God!

Leo Ranzolin

Estero, Florida

THE HEART OF ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

We appreciated Jud Lake's article "The Heart of Adventist Theology" (October 2018), especially his emphasis on our sanctuary doctrine resulting from "a detailed study of the Bible." Millerite believers were stunned 174 years ago when Jesus did not return as they expected. Subsequently, a group of "Bible-believing truth seekers," under the influence of the God's spirit, found biblical evidence for Christ's central role as our great high priest in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.

My wife, Linda, and I have had the privilege of ministering at the Hiram Edson Farm for the past two seasons, and we invite everyone to make plans to visit this historic Adventist site in 2019.

Jim Everhart

Clifton Springs, New York

IN A FEW WORDS...

ADVENTIST CHURCH HELPS SECURE ASYLUM STATUS FOR IRANIAN STUDENT IN THE U.S.

This is so important! May God help us to stand up for our persecuted members all around the world.

Jonathan Karlsson, [Via Web](#)

THE IRONY OF GOD

Clifford Goldstein's stories, both biblical and personal, reveal a God Who is as unpredictable as He is ironic.

Albert Dittes, [Via Web](#)

ANNUAL COUNCIL OPENING HIGHLIGHTS THE COMMITMENT OF EARLY MISSIONARIES

I praise God for the sacrifice of these selfless warriors. Somebody brought the message of salvation to my great grandfather, and today I rejoice in this blessed hope. There will be much rejoicing when our Lord comes!

Thomas Joseph, [Via Web](#)

ADVENTIST BOARDING SCHOOL IN MONGOLIA COULD OPEN BY MID-2019

The infrastructure looks good, thus giving glory to God. I hope many will have the opportunity to study at this institution.

Charles Memba, [Via Web](#)

YOUR TURN

We welcome your letters, noting, as always, that inclusion of a letter in this section does not imply that the ideas expressed are endorsed by either the editors of the *Adventist Review* or the General Conference. Short, specific, timely letters have the best chance at being published (please include your complete address and phone number—even with e-mail messages). Letters will be edited for space and clarity only. Send correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Review*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; Internet: letters@adventistreview.org.

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“People cannot be confronted with things that are beyond their frame of reference and be expected to respond positively to them.”

Boubakar Sanou, p. 14

NEWS



General Conference Executive Committee members line up to speak about the compliance document being considered.

PHOTO: BRENT HARDINGE/ANN

ANNUAL COUNCIL DELEGATES VOTE TO ADOPT COMPLIANCE DOCUMENT

WORLD CHURCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE APPROVES STEPS RECOMMENDED BY UNITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

BY ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

Following more than five hours of presentations and discussion, delegates to the Seventh-day Adventist Church's annual meeting of its full Executive Committee approved a recommendation from the church's Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) on Sunday, October 14, 2018, to create a new compliance process to assist with the need to implement church policies and voted actions.

The action, expressed in a vote of 185 to 124, with two abstaining, approved a document entitled "Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions." The decision was an extension of a vote by the General Conference Executive Committee at its October 2017 meeting. That action referred an earlier proposal, made in 2017 by the same Unity

Oversight Committee, back for further study.

THE VOTED DOCUMENT

The document outlines a process for addressing matters of noncompliance within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In summary, the process begins with perceived noncompliance being reported to the administrative level of the Church closest to the

The document emphasizes the need for “Christian due process,” including prayer and dialogue and “a supportive atmosphere.”

matter. The document emphasizes the need for “Christian due process,” including prayer and dialogue and “a supportive atmosphere.” As part of the process, the noncompliant entity would be asked to provide evidence of compliance or a plan to “achieve sustained compliance.”

If no resolution is reached at the closest administrative levels, the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) may refer the matter to one of five advisory committees. These commit-

tees, termed “compliance committees,” had earlier been endorsed by ADCOM.

Officers Committee and the Executive Committee. The document next outlines a process of appeal as well as disciplinary measures. These disciplinary measures may be voted only by the Executive Committee, and may include official warnings and public reprimand. In the event of persistent noncompliance, potential removal from Executive Committee membership by a two-thirds majority vote is allowed according to the Bylaws of the General Conference Constitution.

hands. It is not my document.”

Wilson clarified there would be no recommendations coming from the compliance committees at this year’s Annual Council meeting.

Wilson then asked for all to participate with a “sweet spirit and a Christlike demeanor. We want a very open kind of setting. We want to move ahead with an open and gracious spirit. We are here to do the will of the Lord.”

Michael Ryan, chair of the UOC, introduced the history of the document, including presentations by David Trim, director of Archives, Statistics, and Research; Karnik Doukmetzian, lead counsel for the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and Hensley Mooroooven, Adventist world church undersecretary. Ryan moved the adoption of the document and Mooroooven subsequently read the document aloud.

Seventy-one delegates and invitees lined up at five microphones to address the proposed document.

“This afternoon we are experiencing the church at its best,” said Mark Finley, well-known evangelist and retired GC vice president. “It’s healthy for a church when leaders speak their mind openly and honestly. What I see this afternoon is a church wrestling with an issue.”

Finley went on to speak in favor of the document, saying that “the document does not lead to or foster kingly power. In fact, it presents safeguards against kingly power.” He affirmed the role of policy in a united church: “Policies are mutual agreements, but they



Ted N. C. Wilson chaired the discussion on compliance, assisted by Karen Porter, associate secretary, and Joanne Stango, recording secretary. PHOTO: BRENT HARDINGE/ANN

tees, termed “compliance committees,” had earlier been endorsed by ADCOM.

After studying the matter, the compliance committee may make recommendations to ADCOM for disciplinary measures. ADCOM may then refer the recommendations on to General Conference Division

THE DISCUSSION ON THE FLOOR

The afternoon session began with Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who chaired the afternoon session, reminding attendees that “the origins of the document come from you. It’s your document. It’s in your

Ballots for Sunday's vote on the compliance document are counted.

PHOTO: BRENT HARDINGE/ANN



do govern our actions as church leaders. I pray that we will support it together.”

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church isn’t going to fail,” said Dan Jackson, president of the Church’s North American Division. “God is going to lead His church to a glorious conclusion.” Jackson, however, cautioned about approving the document: “I believe adoption of this document will change relationships within the church. It runs contrary to the pioneers, and to sound business practice. The atmosphere of this document will not unite. North American Division members will feel they have been pushed to the periphery of the church.”

“Faith without freedom is only a chain, a colorless flower,” said Tamas Ocsai, president of the Adventist Church in Hungary. “Freedom of conscience is important for Adventists. My serious concern is: ‘Do we really want to use our

recent document to hurt the unity of our beloved church family?’”

“I’m in favor of this document,” said Esther Abayo from the East-Central Africa Division. “All of us believe that compliance is necessary. The only fear I see is people afraid of consequences coming from noncompliance.”

“Most people in the local church are thinking more of advancing and fulfilling the mission of the church,” offered Adan Ramos Lagos from the Inter-American Division. “I believe we have enough working policies and we should be abiding by them.”

“We will be more successful in our mission and our relationship will be much deeper because here we learned to understand each other in spite of the difference of opinion,” added Mikhail Kaminskiy, president of the Church’s Euro-Asia Division.

Mario Ceballos, director of Ad-

ventist Chaplaincy Ministries for the world church, the last delegate to speak, offered a pastoral perspective: “The greatest test of faith is when you don’t get what you want, but still you are able to say, ‘Thank You, Lord.’”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Wilson expressed appreciation to the Executive Committee members for the good spirit exhibited during the afternoon. “I am extraordinarily impressed with your patience. I also want to express my deep appreciation to you as a body as to the way you have spoken. That speaks volumes.”

“As we leave here tonight,” concluded Wilson, “let us leave united in shedding light on all those who need to know about Christ’s soon return.”

To read the entire voted document online, visit the following webpage: goo.gl/MsYWTb.



David Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), shares highlights from a 2018 global survey of nearly 64,000 church members with delegates at Annual Council on October 15, 2018.

PHOTO: RICHARD CONSTANTINESCU

ADVENTIST CHURCH PRESENTS “I WILL GO” STRATEGIC PLAN

**ANNUAL COUNCIL DELEGATES
APPROVE AN UPDATED MISSION STATEMENT.**

BY ANDREW MCCHESENEY, ADVENTIST MISSION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church unveiled a five-year strategic plan called “I Will Go,” and approved an updated mission statement that aims to reflect more closely the wording of the Great Commission, the instruction Jesus presented in Matthew 28.

The draft strategy pursues many goals of the current five-year plan, “Reach the World,” but simplifies the plan while retaining its sharp focus on spreading the gospel and nurturing church members. It will come to a vote at 2019 Annual Council, and if approved, be implemented from the 2020 General Conference session.

“We present this at Annual Council two years before General Conference session so union [conference] presidents can look at it and become acquainted with it,” said Michael Ryan, special assistant to the General Conference president, who spearheaded the plan, speaking to 2018 Annual Council delegates on October 15, 2018.

The six-page “I Will Go” plan contains 10 objectives, compared to 21 objectives in “Reach the World.”

“The floor asked us to reduce that to something we could get our arms around,” Ryan said. “So we

reduced it.”

The 10 objectives start with a call “to revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors, but every church member, young and old, in a journey of discipleship.”



An Annual Council attendee examines the Seventh-day Adventist Church's draft 2020-25 strategic plan, “I Will Go,” during its presentation in Battle Creek, Michigan.

RICHARD CONSTANTINESCU

Other objectives are to “strengthen Adventist outreach in large cities” and to prioritize the development of “resources for mission to non-Christian religions and belief systems.”

The strategic plan also includes a list of key performance indicators (KPI) divided into two categories: KPIs for all divisions, which the General Conference will measure through

research, and “suggested KPIs” for select divisions. Ryan asked division and union [conference] leaders to review the suggested KPIs and weigh in before 2019 Annual Council.

The plan’s name, “I Will Go,” came from Argentina’s River Plate Adventist University, whose mission program has the same name. The university gave permission for use of the name and its program’s student-designed logo.

MANY HOURS OF RESEARCH

The “I Will Go” draft is the result of many hours of work and is based on a worldwide survey by the General Conference’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR), which collaborated with divisions and union [conferences] to collect data on membership trends. The 2018 survey of 63,756 Adventists in all 13 world divisions has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

“We are very confident in what we are sharing,” David Trim, director of ASTR, told Annual Council delegates.

One of the KPI goals for all divisions is for a “significant increase in the number of church members regularly attending divine service and Sabbath School.” The 2018 survey indicated that weekly church attendance is down by 7 percent to 71 percent of the church’s 21 million members, compared to 78 percent in the previous survey in 2013. “We don’t know why that is, but it is a trend that we want to reverse,” Trim said.

On the other hand, more Adventists are studying the Bible daily. The



Worldview Symposium presenters were represented by Adventist scholars from around the world. PHOTO: ADVENTIST REVIEW

number of respondents who reported studying the Bible once or more per day increased by 7 percent to 49 percent. Trim said this extends and confirms an upward trend first detected in the 2013 survey. He gave credit to world church initiatives that started after the 2010 General Conference session, such as Revival and Reformation, which includes a daily Bible study plan called Believe His Prophets. “An alarming trend has been reversed,” he said.

But, he noted, many more church members should be reading the Bible daily.

UPDATED MISSION STATEMENT

Several hours before the “I Will Go” presentation, Annual Council delegates approved the revision of the church’s mission statement to read, “Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the three angels’ messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rev. 14:6-12).”

The previous statement read, “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels’ messages (Revelation 14:6-12), and to prepare the world for Christ’s soon return.”

Artur Stele, a general vice president of the General Conference, who introduced the updated statement, said the wording is meant to reflect more precisely the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and to incorporate the missional ideas of Acts 1:8 and the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14.

Stele also said an easy-to-remember mission statement was sought, and he considers the result to be a success. “This is the first mission statement that I have learned by heart,” he said. ♣

SCHOLARS DISCUSS BIBLICAL FAITHFULNESS IN A PLURALISTIC AGE

“TRANSFORMING WORLDVIEWS” EVENT ASKS HARD QUESTIONS, ATTEMPTS ANSWERS.

BY ADVENTIST REVIEW STAFF

What do Adventist millennials and other demographic groups think about Adventism? More urgently, how do they interpret the world? What kinds of answers are Adventist theologians providing in response to their questions?

To consider and propose sound responses to these intellectual and moral questions, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary conducted a symposium on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States. The October 18-20, 2018, event followed the theme “Transforming Worldviews: Biblical Faithfulness in a Pluralistic Age.”

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The keynote address was delivered by renowned theologian and scholar Kevin J. Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Vanhoozer expressed his delight at being on the campus of the Adventist seminary, especially because it gave him the opportunity to meet again several of the seminary’s scholars with whom he has been closely associated in one capacity or another, including as their teacher.

In his opening remarks, Vanhoozer set about to define worldview for his audience. “Worldview is the software that runs our lives, a map that orients our life in the world, and a control story,” he said. But his pointed question was “Whose story?”

WORLDVIEW AND MISSION

Several presenters at the symposium set out to discuss how worldview can inform the Christian way of relating to mission, something that is considered a central theme in the divine revelations recorded in the Bible. Among them was Andrews University assistant professor of world mission Boubakar Sanou, who

presented “Exegeting the Bible and the Social Location of the Gospel Recipients: A Case for Worldview Transformation.”

Sanou reminded attendees that in God’s efforts to reach and redeem sinful humans, He often resorted to creative ways that may sometimes seem unorthodox. “Because humans are all influenced and limited by the assumptions of their social locations . . . God took into consideration their less-than-perfect contextual frame of reference in the process of revealing His Word to them so that they could meaningfully relate to Him,” he said.

Sanou then suggested that today, “people cannot be confronted with things that are beyond their frame of reference and be expected to respond positively to them.” This is why “biblical interpreters need to exegete their intended readers’ social location with the same rigor they apply to the exegesis of biblical texts.” This will help readers to “respond to and make intelligent decisions in favor of the gospel,” he said.

TWO YEARS IN THE MAKING

Organizers said the conference was two years from planning to execution and was born of a concern that seminary dean Jiří Moskala raised with his faculty. “I recognized that worldview goes beyond a focus on hermeneutics to the thinking that lies behind our interpretive activity, and that the presuppositions informing our interpretive activity need themselves to be informed and shaped by the Bible,” Moskala said.

Organizers explained that the goal of the exercise was to highlight the fundamental importance of what presenters identified as a biblical worldview or a biblically shaped worldview.

Ante Jeronic, associate professor of ethics and theology, who led the symposium steering committee, added, “We held this conference not just because we live in a culture with a plurality of worldviews, but also because the global church is facing the challenge of unstated worldview commitments undermining the ethical practices of Adventists.”

Organizers believe a major strength of the symposium was the widely varying cultural perspectives and academic disciplines that characterized the 18 other scholarly papers presented throughout the event. The conference closed with a panel discussion on Sabbath afternoon featuring seven presenters and moderated by Moskala.

Along with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, other entities that cosponsored the event were the General Conference Biblical Research Institute and the Adventist Theological Society. Another symposium, on the topic of theodicy, is being contemplated for a later date, organizers said. ▀

“SIDE BY SIDE” SONGWRITER JEFF WOOD PASSES AWAY

**HIS WORK, OFTEN BEHIND
THE SCENES, TOUCHED THE
LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF
ADVENTISTS.**

BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN,
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

After six years of declining health that included two bouts with cancer, Jeff Wood, Adventist songwriter, screenwriter, producer, and director, passed to his rest on October 11, 2018, in Angwin, California. He was 67.

Wood made a significant contribution to Seventh-day Adventist Church media during the course of a career spanning several decades. As one North American Division (NAD) officer stated: “Jeff’s fingerprints were all over almost every media project from the church before, during, and after the days of the Adventist Media Center in California.” Wood was the producer and director of at least two NAD video reports for General Conference sessions.

Wood helped create the *Lifestyle Magazine* television talk show, and his latest project was the writing of the 2018 Breath of Life Christmas special that will air on major television networks across the U.S. this holiday season. As producer and director, Wood also put his heart and soul into the 2012 film

A musician and prolific writer, Wood authored songs with members of the Heritage Singers, and wrote the Pathfinder song “We Are His Hands.”



Jeff Wood (left) poses with Tom Hillman, actor from the film *Hell and Mr. Fudge*, and Pat Arrabito, LLT cofounder. PHOTO: PAT ARRABITO.

Hell and Mr. Fudge, the story of an eccentric stranger hiring Edward Fudge, a small-town preacher, to investigate hell.

A musician and prolific writer, Wood authored songs with members of the Heritage Singers, and wrote the Pathfinder song “We Are His Hands.” He may best be known for his song “Side by Side,” originally recorded by the Heritage Singers, and sung in thousands of churches around the world. Max Mace, founder/director of the Heritage Singers, commented on Facebook that his heart “is broken. Jeff and I really became good friends—we would email in the middle of the night when we both could not sleep. We had big plans; now we’ll have to wait till we meet in heaven.”

Mike Tucker, speaker/director of Faith for Today broadcast media ministry, wrote this on Facebook in response to news of Wood’s death: “God blessed me immensely by allowing me to work with this gentle, kind man. I trusted him im-

PLICITLY. He fully understood the goals and vision of *Faith for Today* and *Lifestyle Magazine*. He made our television programs great! Because of his attention to detail, *Lifestyle Magazine* has won an incredible number of high awards against productions with much greater budgets and better on-camera talent. And, by the way, Jeff was instrumental in the creation of *Lifestyle Magazine* in the first place. He produced probably 90 percent of the shows that have aired since its creation more than three decades ago.”

Tucker went on to share that visionary Wood was an important part of the small team that created *Mad About Marriage*. “Because of a creative session that included Jeff, we have television programs, live seminars, small group curriculum, impressive Facebook and Twitter sites, weekly marriage tips via email, and a web page that boasts more than 400 articles and numerous short videos on marriage.”

“Jeff was an answer to my prayers for a producer when we were ready for production on *The Seventh Day* series [with Hal Holbrook], and we benefitted from every one of his many talents: producer, director, musician, writer, organizer,” said Pat Arrabito, cofounder of LLT Productions, a California-based non-profit organization dedicated to producing documentary films on religious and historical subjects. “He had an amazingly creative mind and an innate ability to structure a project well. Jeff had this quiet, kind manner that always brought out the best in talent and crew.” Wood, who started working with LLT in 1998, produced and directed *The Seventh Day*, *Hell and Mr. Fudge*, and *The Wandering Day*.

Jim Wood, who collaborated with his brother on many projects and currently works as a writer and associate producer at LLT, said that “Jeff finally won his six-year battle with disease. . . . He slipped out of his enemy’s grasp and into peace and rest just 17 days short of his sixty-eighth birthday. Those of us whose lives are intertwined with his are stunned, grief-stricken, heartbroken, and bereft. This is the price of love—the price we are willing to pay for his freedom.”

Jim added that Scripture gives humanity good news (see 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). He said, “We grieve, but we have hope.”

Wood is survived by his wife, Gerry; son, Jeremy; daughter, Jill; brothers James (“Jim”) and Jon; and a sister, Jan Wood. ♣

“One of the happiest calls I have ever made was to tell her that she had been granted asylum.”

Todd McFarland

ADVENTIST CHURCH HELPS SECURE ASYLUM STATUS FOR IRANIAN STUDENT

THE WOMAN WAS FIRST INTRODUCED TO ADVENTISM WHILE STUDYING INTERNATIONALLY.

BY MYLON MEDLEY, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

An asylum claim submitted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church on behalf of an Iranian student who converted to Adventism in the United States was recently granted, ending a four-year process.

“It’s important for members to know the church takes issues of religious discrimination seriously,” said Todd McFarland, associate general counsel of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. “The church is protecting members who may face consequences because of their faith if they were forced to return to their country.”

In July 2014 McFarland received a phone call from an Iranian woman who was pursuing graduate studies in the U.S. and seeking asylum. The student was first introduced to Adventism when she was studying abroad before she came to the U.S. “Through a series of circumstances she studied the Bible with some Adventist university students. She hadn’t heard of Adventists before,” McFarland said.

Once in the U.S. on a student visa, the woman began baptismal classes at a local church near her university. She mentioned to a church member that when she returned to her country, she would face conse-

quences to her new faith. The member assured her that the Adventist Church has ways to help through the Office of General Counsel at the General Conference, the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland.

“By the time I met her she was still studying for baptism,” said McFarland, who first contacted the student in January 2015. After vetting her, McFarland talked to her about Adventist beliefs and her understanding of the church. “We filed her claim shortly after that. It took several years to wind through the system,” he said.

According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a person may seek asylum if they are unable or unwilling to return home because they fear serious harm or persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. An asylum seeker can apply for protection within one year of arrival to the U.S., or at a port of entry. A person who meets all the requirements but is located outside the U.S. would apply for refugee status.

“We’ve had only a handful of

these cases,” McFarland said, in reference to the number of Adventists in North America who have sought asylum on the basis of religion over the past few decades. “Christians, and Adventists in particular, do suffer persecution around the world, and it can be horrific. However, in large segments of the world, Adventists have had a relatively good amount of religious freedom, especially where the church has a large presence.” Limiting the number of religious asylum cases in the United States is the fact that to make such a claim, a person must be in the United States. “Adventists and other Christians who suffer the most severe forms of religious persecution also find themselves unable to get to a country where they could seek asylum,” McFarland said.

The Office of General Counsel made a case for the Iranian woman’s asylum by laying out the conditions of her native country. Evidence was presented with religious discrimination reports from the U.S. State Department, a variety of nongovernmental organizations, the International Religious Liberty Association, and news stories.

The student’s claim was left pending until early 2018, when she was granted an interview with USCIS.

“One of the happiest calls I have ever made was to tell her that she had been granted asylum. Individuals simply should not face persecution and potentially death simply because of their faith,” McFarland said. ▀



ANNUAL COUNCIL 2018 MATERIALS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE.

The 2018 Annual Council meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee, which met in Battle Creek, Michigan, generated many documents and articles that are available online at AdventistReview.org/AnnualCouncil. Among the materials gathered are articles on the major reports, a summary of the discussion and vote on the compliance document recommended by the Unity Oversight Committee, and Adventist heritage presentations given in the days preceding the business meetings.



ADVENTIST BOARDING SCHOOL IN MONGOLIA COULD OPEN BY MID-2019.

Donations from around the world will help to finish a Seventh-day Adventist boarding school in Mongolia. New buildings are being erected on a plot of 15 acres about 35 miles (56 kilometers) from the capital. Dining room, dormitories, and boarding school blocks are ready. The boarding school is due to open in mid-2019, with an initial capacity of 84 students, aiming for an enrollment of 500 students within five years.



2,000 YOUNG PEOPLE SERVE CHILEANS ON NATIONAL HOLIDAY.

In mid-September 2018 thousands of young Seventh-day Adventists traveled to the country's Adventist Youth Congress held in seven cities. As part of youth congress activities, attendees reached out to local communities with acts of service. Groups spread out across the country distributed boxed lunches, gave out hugs, organized children's programs for families in need, cleaned playgrounds, and gave out books.



ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ATTEND U.N. INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM.

More than 1,000 delegates from 300 universities in almost 90 countries gathered in Bangkok for the ninth University Scholars Leadership Symposium, organized by the United Nations. Thirteen of the delegates were from Avondale College, in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. The symposium, which the U.N. holds in a developing country in the Asia-Pacific region each year, helps students develop leadership and life skills to benefit the world around them.



ADVENTIST CHAPLAIN PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN IN THE U.S. NAVY RESERVE.

Washington Johnson II, associate director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) for the North American church region, was recently promoted to the rank of O-6, or captain, in the U.S. Navy Reserve. According to Paul Anderson, ACM North America director, only five Adventist chaplains have risen to the rank of captain, including Barry Black, chaplain of the U.S. Senate, and Herman Kibble, the first to achieve the rank.



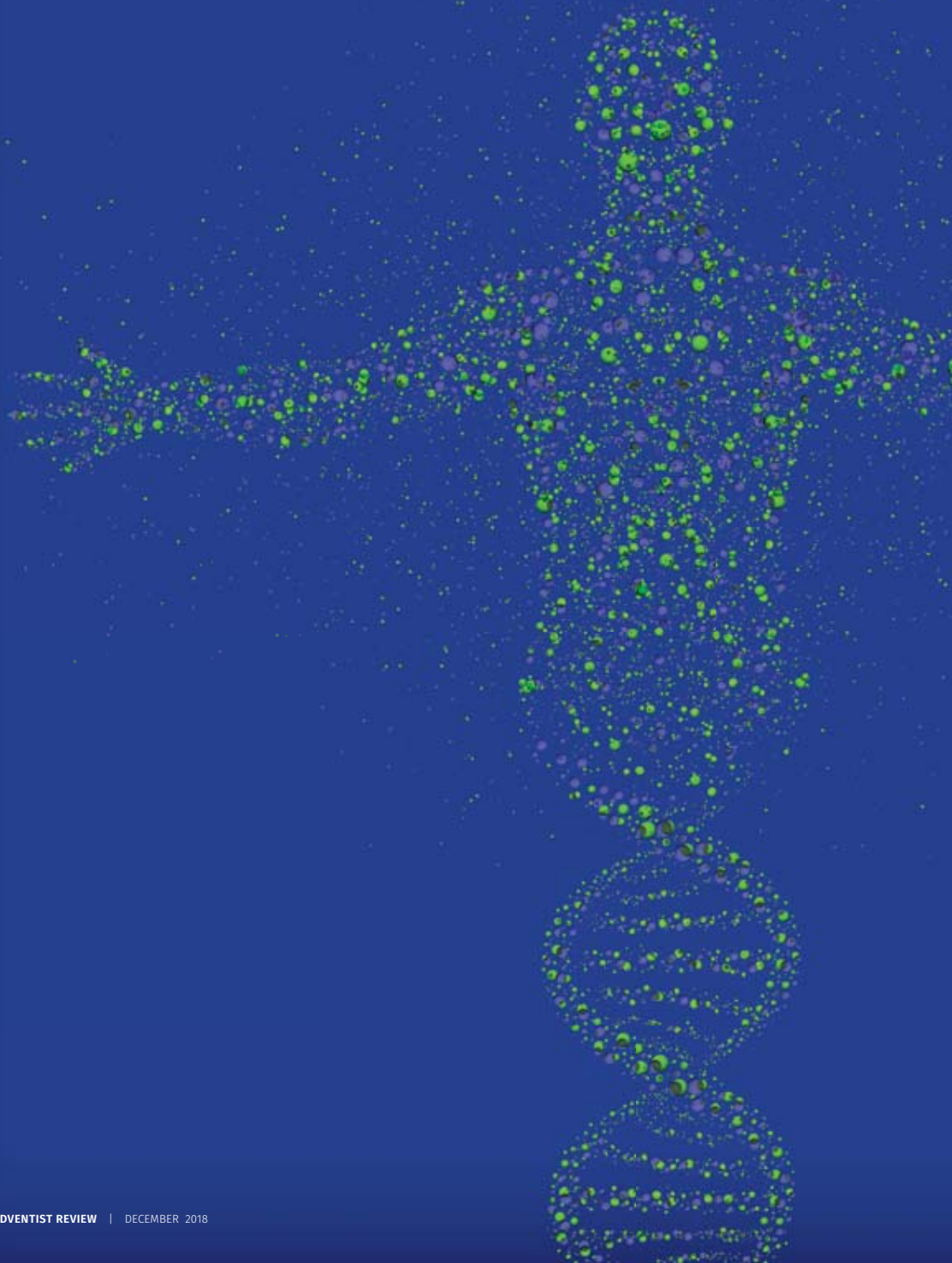
ADVENTIST CHURCH EMBARKS ON "NEW ERA" IN MISSION WORK.

The Mission Board of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists voted on October 5, 2018, to expand its approach to mission work around the world. Rather than following only traditional methods of identifying a job opening in a foreign country and sending a missionary to fill it, the Adventist Church will also seek opportunities among people groups unreached or underreached by the gospel and deploy teams of specially trained missionaries to establish new work.



IN NORTH AMERICA "CONSCIENCE AND JUSTICE COUNCIL" EDUCATES AND EMPOWERS.

The Third Annual Convention of the Conscience and Justice Council convened recently under the theme "Freedom and Equality." The Conscience and Justice Council is another name given to the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty directors of regional (African American) conferences, representatives from the North Pacific and Pacific Union conferences, and from Oakwood University. Topics discussed included Adventist heritage and justice, immigration, and religious persecution situations in the U.S. and around the world.





CREATION AND RESURRECTION

*Evolution doesn't work
for resurrection*

CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

No contemporary teaching is more antithetical to Scripture, or more overtly contrary to Christianity, than evolution—the assumption that about 4 billion years ago a simple life form started on earth and then, through the unguided and nondirected process of random mutation and natural selection, all life, from bacteria to Bostonians, arose.

CONSIDER THE RESURRECTION

The scientific establishment, however, says that evolution is true. And because so many Christians have bought into the great myth of our era, that scientific truth takes precedence over all rival claims (“scientism”), many Christians have accepted evolution, even though the teaching destroys every Christian doctrine.

Take the resurrection of the dead. In any evolutionary paradigm, even one in which God somehow is involved, how does one make sense of the promised resurrection of the saints at the end of time? One doesn't, because the resurrection, as depicted in Scripture, becomes farcical if evolution is to be believed.

When Billy Graham died in early 2018, in pulpits worldwide preachers proclaimed that he had “received his final reward,” or that he had “gone to his glory.” Billy Graham and any Christian who dies, it is believed, ascends straightway to eternal heavenly bliss.

Many Christian scholars of varied theological

Transformation from death to eternal life happens in “the twinkling of an eye.”

persuasions, however, understand things differently. Talking about the end-time resurrection of the dead as the great Christian hope, N. T. Wright wrote: “This is actually the official view of all mainstream orthodox theologians, Catholic and Protestant, except for those who think that after death we pass at once into an eternity . . . a quite popular view but one which contains many serious difficulties.”¹

Meanwhile, theologians expound numerous postulations regarding the states of the dead before the resurrection. Some believe that the saints are in heaven, at least temporarily; others that they’re in a shadowy existence somewhere; some believe that the dead sleep unconscious until the resurrection; others grant that they don’t know what happens immediately after death.

Whatever the diversity of thought, the idea of a disembodied soul ascending into heaven at death as their final reward is closer to ancient Greek philosophy than to sound Christian theology. And Christian thinkers know it. The great hope of the Christian isn’t found, they know, in what happens immediately after death, but instead in the promised resurrection of the dead at the end time.

ADAM AND JESUS

No serious attempt to understand New Testament theology, including the resurrection, can deny how central a sinless Adam, who brought death to the world, was to Paul’s theology. In other words, Paul interpreted Genesis 1-3 as a “fundamentalist” would today.

A half a dozen times in Romans 5 Paul makes a one-to-one correspondence from Adam to Jesus. In Romans 5:17-19 alone he makes a direct link between the two men three times: “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people,

so also one righteousness act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

Adam brought death; Jesus brought life. Period.

One slight problem, however. In any evolutionary model there’s no way that one man, Adam, could have brought death into the world. The opposite is true: in the theory of evolution death, billions of years of it, brought Adam into the world instead. The idea of a holy, sinless human being who, through his own action, caused death makes any evolutionary model of human origins impossible.

Theistic evolutionist Denis Lamoureux wrote: “First, Adam never existed. . . . Second, Adam never actually sinned, because he never existed. Consequently, sin did not enter the world on account of Adam. Third, Adam was never judged by God to suffer and die.”² Though not all theistic evolutionists are so dogmatic, by taking this stance Lamoureux spares himself the pain and embarrassment of trying to make billions of years of evolution fit with a sinless Adam who, according to the New Testament, brought death to the world.

ADAM, JESUS, AND THE RESURRECTION

The problem multiplies because Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, makes a clear link between Adam’s fall and Christ’s death and resurrection, as well as our death (because of Adam’s fall) and our resurrection (because of Christ’s resurrection).

“But now,” Paul wrote, “Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-22, NKJV).³

Adam brought death (“for in Adam all die”), but Christ will bring life (“in Christ all shall be made

alive”), and this happens at the resurrection of the dead. However, once an Adam who caused death is rejected, the sequence falls apart even before it starts. In the standard evolutionary model no Adam brought death into existence. How could he, when it was death itself that brought Adam into existence instead?

Thus evolution as the source of our origins destroys any hope of the resurrection, at least if Paul is to be taken seriously.

THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

Also, how quickly, and by what process, does this promised resurrection of the dead at the end of time occur? Here, too, Paul is unambiguous: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16, NKJV). And: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:51-53, NKJV).

The dead rise, incorruptible, immortal. This transformation from death to life, eternal life, happens in a moment, in “the twinkling of an eye.” People who have been dead millennia—their bodies long disintegrated into atoms and scattered over the globe—are instantly brought back to life. We are talking about a manifestation of supernatural power not seen since, perhaps, the creation of the world itself, at least the creation depicted in Scripture.

This re-creation of humanity is a radically different process from what theistic evolution proposes. God took billions of years of predation, violence, death, extinction, catastrophe, the survival of the fittest, and so forth, until finally getting something in the “image of God.” Certainly no Christian would actually think that God would

use that same process, again, only now to re-create us. On the other hand, if the six days of Genesis 1 can be allegorized away to mean billions of years, then perhaps the “twinkling of an eye” can be, too—though that doesn’t seem to be a move theistic evolutionists are making (at least not yet).

The question is: Why would the Lord use billions of years of natural processes, such as random mutation and natural selection, to create humanity in the first place, when, in a second, He does it quickly and supernaturally? If this quick and supernatural creation is good enough for the second time, why not the first—just as depicted in Genesis?

CREATION AND RESURRECTION

Creation, how we first got here; and resurrection, how we ultimately end up—are inseparably connected in Scripture. The six-day Genesis account, in which a sinless Adam is formed in a world without death, is connected directly to Jesus. In fact, Jesus is sometimes called “the Second Adam” because, according to Paul, this Second Adam undid the death that this first Adam, through disobedience, brought to the world. This undoing occurs, ultimately, at the end-time resurrection of the dead (see 1 Cor. 15:26).

Adam, Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the connection between them in the biblical account of creation, fits seamlessly. In the account of origins that science now promotes, and that is dogmatically accepted by so many Christians, this connection degenerates into broken strands that make the New Testament justification for the resurrection, at least in any serious reading of the apostle Paul, unintelligible, even farcical. 🗡️

¹ ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/rethinking-the-tradition/

² Quoted in J. P. Moreland, Christopher Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Theistic Evolution* (Crossway; Wheaton, Ill., 2017), p. 687.

³ Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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GOD'S SABBATH STAMP

RICHARD M. DAVIDSON

In nature and in the Bible the God of creation and truth has tendered strong evidence of the high moral and physical significance of the Sabbath principle, and of His commitment to blessing all creation with the gift of Sabbath rest.

PSALM 92

In 1988 Israeli biblical scholar Jacob Bazak published an article on Psalm 92.¹ After a scholarly presentation of my own on that psalm I discovered that Bazak, whom I had liberally cited, had been in attendance. Bazak invited my wife, Jo Ann, and me to visit him the next time we came to Israel. He treated us wonderfully when we did. We discovered that he was not only an eminent scholar but also a justice of the Israeli Supreme Court. I invited him to lecture at Andrews University if he was ever in the United States again, and he did. When he left, he told us he was returning to Israel as a "missionary for the Adventists of the Seventh-day!"

I owe to Jacob Bazak my first awareness of the "sabbatic stamp" placed by God upon the psalm for the Sabbath, Psalm 92. He pointed out numerous literary aspects of Psalm 92 highlighting the number 7, showing why the psalm is labeled "for the Sabbath day."

More “seven-ness” than many have realized

For example, the psalm uses the covenant name “Lord” (YHWH) just seven times; it contains seven different epithets for the wicked,² and the same number of positive qualities of the righteous.³ Bazak also points out that the midpoint and climax of the psalm (verse 8) is flanked by seven poetic verses on either side.⁴

The psalm’s overall structure features five stanzas (or strophes), each with six lines, except for the climactic middle stanza, which contains seven. As Franz Delitzsch puts it: “The middle of the psalm bears the stamp of the sabbatic number.”⁵ Psalm 92 integrates theological themes [Sabbath] and structural form [seven-ness] so well that the ancient Hebrews entitled it “a psalm,” a “song for the Sabbath day.”

SABBATIC STAMPS IN THE PENTATEUCH

Psalm 92 is hardly unique to the Bible in its sabbatic stamp. The Bible’s first five books frequently display it. In Genesis 2:1-3 Moses describes God’s establishment of the Sabbath in Eden. He marks the passage with the sabbatic stamp by giving seven words to each of its three statements on God’s formation of the Sabbath. This passage is the first of many sabbatic-stamped passages and elements in the Bible.

For example, the Pentateuch contains seven distinctive Sabbath commands on everything from creation, through redemption, to the whys and wherefores of proper worship. The seven commands are: (1) creation (Ex. 20:8-11); (2) redemption (Deut. 5:12-15); (3) humanitarian concerns (Ex. 23:12, repeated in Deut. 5:13, 14); (4) sanctification and celebration (Ex. 31:13-16); (5) freedom from all work (Ex. 35:2, 3); (6) family and faith community ties (Lev. 19:3); and (7) public worship (Lev. 23:3).

Each of these commands contains its own inner sabbatic stamp. A focus on one of these, the Sabbath commandment of Exodus 20, may serve to illustrate accurately and compellingly the depth of purpose and the height of creative genius that

God’s sacred Word possesses and displays, specifically in relation to the sabbatic stamp.

THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT—EXODUS 20:8-11

In the Ten Commandments God Himself spoke and wrote His words in stone. The fourth commandment, the one about the Sabbath, is stamped with sabbatic markers—elements of seven-ness—in such quantity and significance that it is difficult to know where to begin. As good a place as any may be the total number of words in the commandment. A variety of approaches exists for counting words in the text of the Hebrew Bible. But whichever counting rule we follow leads to a total that is a multiple of seven, e.g., (1) one approach yields 56 words; (2) another yields 35 words.⁶ Counting according to the rhythmic flow of the commandment shows up 42 accented words. I state again: the range of approaches to counting words in the Hebrew text of the fourth commandment consistently yields a total that is a multiple of the number 7.

The list of individuals and household groups who receive the Sabbath blessing of rest is also designed to focus on the number 7: rather than listing children and slaves, the commandment identifies recipients with a particularity that not only shows God’s care for each but also focuses the number seven as an essential element of the commandment about the seventh day. Thus the list comprises (1) parent, (2) son, (3) daughter, (4) male slave, (5) female slave, (6) animals, and (7) visiting uncircumcised alien.

On the plains of Moab, Moses’ farewell speech to Israel includes a repetition of the fourth commandment that varies from the Exodus wording while displaying its own seven-ness: verses 12-14 contain 35 accented Hebrew words, or five multiples of seven; then verse 15, ending with the paragraph divider, contains 21 accented words, or three multiples of seven. The entire commandment, paragraph divider included, thus contains 56 accented words or eight multiples of seven.

Transformation from death to eternal life happens in “the twinkling of an eye.”

Overall the seven Sabbath commandments of the Torah feature varied multiples of seven, seven of them in all, including 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (7 x 2) and 8. Other seven-based features of the Sabbath in the Pentateuch include the seven verbs used for Sabbath rest,⁷ each with its own nuanced contribution to that blessed experience; and Isaiah’s climactic declaration on Sabbathkeeping (Isa. 58:13, 14), in which verse 13 has 21 accented words [7 x 3] and verse 14 has another 14 of its own [7 x 2].

SEVEN-NESS IN NATURE

The New Testament warrants its own exploration, with the Gospel writers recording no more or less than seven Sabbath miracles of Jesus.⁸ But a move from the written word to the messages of the natural world may enhance our regard for the significance of seventh-day Sabbath rest God has inscribed across the reaches of the cosmos He has given us to develop, rule, and learn from.

Nature’s most stable chemical structure is the six-membered ring structure (with the hollow seventh part implied in the middle).⁹ In the animal and vegetable kingdoms seven-day (circaseptan) rhythms have been identified in many physiological functions of animals,¹⁰ including rats, face flies, and various plants and other life-forms.¹¹ In relation to the seventh-day Sabbath, a larger question on seven-ness in nature looms, as follows: does the scientific evidence in nature point toward Saturday, the week’s seventh day, as the day of rest?

THE PINEAL PROJECT

Since 2011 Kenneth Greenaway’s “Pineal Project” research has focused on the pineal gland, a pea-sized endocrine gland in the middle of the brain that synthesizes and releases the hormone melatonin as night falls. Greenaway has found evidence suggesting that the pineal gland, at least in some animals, not only has a circaseptan (seven-day) rhythm, but that this rhythm highlights a specific day of the week, Saturday. In the case

of rats, for example, Vollrath (et al.) found that the pineal gland releases its calming and mood-enhancing melatonin maximally on Saturdays.¹²

Greenaway notes that the moods enhanced maximally on Saturday—those conducive to rest, tranquillity, and enhanced worship experience—are connected with the seventh-day Sabbath in Scripture. He further cites research done on plants and animals at the University of Minnesota on the biological week and broader time structures. This research has repeatedly found that seven-day rhythms can be amplified and resynchronized by a single stimulus, i.e., in response to a one-time event.¹³

Greenaway postulates, based upon this research, that God’s one-time stimulus of *blessing* and *sancifying* the seventh day at Creation may have evoked a *literal* physiological, endocrinological, and immunological response in the pineal gland with increased melatonin output on that initial seventh day, something that may conceivably be amplified at each subsequent seventh day.¹⁴

SABBATHKEEPING ANIMALS

Insects and four-footed beasts have also given evidence in a variety of contexts, of the seventh-day Sabbath stamp.

Seventh-day Beavers: Darren Cole spent 16 years observing and documenting the habits of a beaver colony in the Modoc National Forest, visiting the colony almost daily, morning and evening, for several years, then sporadically for many more. Cole discovered that these beavers, active on the other days of the week, remained in their lodge every Friday evening and Saturday. In all his years of filming his documentary, he was never able to find the beavers working on Saturday.

Sabbathkeeping Bees: Cole also repeats the account of colonies of bees swarming past his land in southern California every day of the week but Saturday, on their way to the surrounding orange groves. Sang Lee, a frequent visitor to Brazil, has similarly testified about colonies of bees in Brazil,

busy Sunday to Friday, but resting in their hives every Saturday.

Seventh-day Ox: Nickolai Panchuk, a Sabbath-keeper in a Communist labor camp, was finally promised Sabbaths free after years of abuse if he could bring enough water for the camp's needs by Friday sunset. Every week for his next five years in that Soviet prison the ox that dragged the water containers plodded slowly all week through Thursday. On Fridays the animal raced back and forth so fast, to and from the spring, that Nickolai could hardly keep up. The warden acknowledged, "That preacher made a Sabbathkeeper of the ox."

MODERN MANNA MIRACLE

The miracle began on March 19, 1939, on the Adventist Mission Station, Namba, Angola. Drought had inspired a prayer meeting at which church members claimed God's promise to supply their needs as He did for ancient Israel. After the prayer the director's 5-year-old daughter went outside and soon returned excitedly with her hands full of white stuff that she was eating. Her mother and others went outside and found the ground covered with the white stuff, which, like the biblical manna, looked like coriander seeds and tasted sweet, like wafers made with honey. It fell only on the 40 acres of the mission property, and in sufficient quantity to feed and nourish the Adventists of that area until the next harvest.¹⁵ Laboratory analysis found that "the sample can provide a good source of nutrients for human diet, which meets the expectations for a sample of manna."¹⁶

SUMMARY

Observed examples of the sabbatic stamp in nature encourage us to wonder how many more there may be. Their full purpose may remain beyond the determination of science, but not beyond the inspiration for worship of the God of "great and marvelous" works (Rev. 15:3) who sacrificed His all to deliver us from our works of

frustrated strivings to the peace of perfect Sabbath rest in Him (see Heb. 4:1-10).¹⁷

¹Jacob Bazak, "Numerical Devices in Biblical Poetry," *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 333-337.

²"Wicked" and "workers of iniquity"—twice each; "enemies"—three times. See verses 7-11. Bible exts in this article are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³The righteous "flourish like a palm tree," "grow like a cedar in Lebanon," are "[trans]planted in the house of the Lord," "flourish in the courts of our God," "bear fruit in old age," are "fresh [full of sap]," and "flourishing [green, luxuriant]." See verses 12-15.

⁴Bazak, p. 335.

⁵C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. J. Martin et al. (Edinburgh: 1857-1878; reprint, 10 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), vol. 3, p. 67.

⁶(1) counting each vocable separately and including the Hebrew paragraph divider; (2) counting construct chains [genitive phrases] as one; counting vocables joined by *makef* [hyphen] as single words, excluding paragraph markers.

⁷*shabbat* (Gen. 2:2), *nuach* (Ex. 20:11), *naphash* (Ex. 31:17), *'asah* (Ex. 31:16), *kallah* (Gen. 2:2), *berek* (Gen. 2:3), *qadash* (Gen. 2:3).

⁸See Luke 4:31-37—casting out unclean spirit; verses 38, 39—healing Peter's mother-in-law; Luke 6:6-11—man with withered hand; Luke 13:10-17—woman bent over with spirit of infirmity; Luke 14:1-6—man with dropsy; John 5:1-15—man at Pool of Bethesda; John 9:1-34—man blind from birth.

⁹Personal interview with research chemist Ryan Hayes at Andrews University, May 13, 2017.

¹⁰Kenneth G. Greenaway, "Understanding the Biblical Concept of Time and Spiritual Rest" (unpublished paper, January 2015), pp. 9, 10. Cf. S. Hans-Georg et al. "Evidence for a Circaseptan and Circasemiseptan Growth Response to Light-Dark Cycle Shifts in Nucleated and Enucleated Acetabularia Cells, Respectively," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science USA Cell Biology* 83 (1986): 8619-8623.

¹¹Greenaway, p. 10. Cf. F. Halberg, "Quo Vadis Basic and Clinical Chronobiology: Promise for Health Maintenance," *American Journal of Anatomy* 168 (1983): 543-594.

¹²L. Vollrath et al. "Mammalian Pineal Gland: 7-Day Rhythmic Activity?" *Experientia* 31, no. 4 (1975): 458-460.

¹³G. Cornelissen and F. Halberg, "The Biological Week and Broader Time Structures (Chronomes): In Memory of Gunther Hildebrandt," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 90 (2000): 579-586.

¹⁴Greenaway, p. 14.

¹⁵Lora E. Clement, "Let's Talk It Over," *The Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 10, 1946), p. 2; E. L. Cardey, "Manna Falls in Africa!" *Signs of the Times*, Mar. 4, 1947, pp. 5, 12. A friend, Alberto Timm, gave me samples he collected from the mission property, where he says it still falls in small amounts every Wednesday and Friday.

¹⁶A colleague of mine, Gerson Pires de Araujo, reported to me this finding of the Laboratory of Mass Spectrometry, Institute of Chemistry, University of Campinas [UNICAMP], Campinas, Brazil, June 2011.

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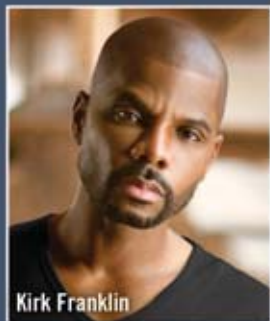
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RESIST THE PYTHON SPIRIT

The resurgence of demonic activity has taken a new turn. A woman in England recently claimed to have a relationship with a ghost. She says she has gone on a hike with him; now she loves him and wants to marry him. Preposterous? Perhaps. Nevertheless, Bristol resident Amethyst Realm says it's real and she wants to go through with the marriage.¹

The absurdity of this incident is undeniable. But the pervasiveness of cavorting with demonic influences isn't. Demonic activity started in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-5); emerged in the post-Flood period (Gen. 10; 11); and had a consistent presence throughout the Old Testament (Lev. 19:31; Isa. 8:19). Devilish activity assumed a new intensity during the time of Christ (Mark 5:1-20) and the early church (Acts 5:1-11; 19:11-20).

Demonic activity continues today. "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

The apostle Paul encountered demonic power on his second missionary journey when he was confronted with a demon-possessed woman (Acts 16:16-18). She was doubly enslaved, to her human master and to a demon master. The original language conveys that she had a python spirit (verse 16), a spirit of divination. It had its origin in Greek mythology: a python serpent guarded the Delphic oracle. The python, and the snake in general, symbolize the varied techniques and activities of evil spirits. This woman persistently followed Paul and his team claiming to support their gospel message, while simultaneously bringing attention to herself. Two helpful truths emerge.

First, whenever God's work progresses it will be countered by satanic resistance. Though demonic activity may take various forms, it is evident in every habitable corner of the world.

Second, this evil spirit continues today but takes different forms, as when the devil uses people, especially professed believers, to impersonate those who apparently believe and support the gospel and its truth but are actually agents of unrighteousness through their allegiances, practices, or influences. They can be aware of their hypocrisy, or they may be deceived and unconscious that they are being used as mediums for darkness.

Today's python agents, in or out of the church, often assume a benign and supportive posture. Ellen White wrote: "Satan has many in his employ, but is most successful when he can use professed Christians for his satanic work. And the greater their influence, the more elevated their position, the more knowledge they profess of God and His service, the more successfully can he use them."²

But the divine solution for lurking pythons is not complicated. Three suggestions:

1. We need light and power to resist this demonic foe, and the Bible gives that power (Ps. 119). So study the Bible consistently.
2. Submit to Jesus in everything and claim the power of God. God is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4).
3. Put on the spiritual armor (Eph. 6), all of it, every day. Through prayer (alone and with others), combined with your will, stand until Jesus comes, or until you die standing.

¹ HuffPost, apple.news/ASebUVptRQcia9YzEpt8F4g.

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 5, p. 137.

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TRANSFORMATION TIPS
DELBERT W. BAKER



TODAY'S PYTHON AGENTS, IN OR OUT OF THE CHURCH, OFTEN ASSUMES A BENIGN AND SUPPORTIVE POSTURE.



Thinking things through and believing

FAITH IN SCIENCE THAT MAKES SENSE

BELLINY PHAETON

What do you believe in and why? Are you a Christian simply because your parents trained you that way from childhood? Are you unsure of what to believe? Have you already labeled yourself “atheist”? Then let’s talk: I am a young, educated millennial with a story.

MY STORY BEGINS

I grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home, a pastor’s daughter, never questioning what my parents taught me. In terms of philosophy, morals, values, religion, what they taught me was fact. Contradictions of their teachings were garbage. If I needed to know about evolution to pass exams, I learned what I needed to learn, passed the test, and: garbage. No questions asked . . . until my sophomore year of college.

AWAKENING DOUBTS

College sociology taught me social theories that made sense. I accepted them at face value. Later, as I thought more about them, I realized that they walked hand in hand with evolution. I wondered: *Is evolution compatible with the Bible? Is what I’m learning about relativism compatible with the Bible? Is it true that there is no absolute standard of right and wrong?* I realized that I had

begun to question: questioning Old Testament positions, questioning my father.

One day my father asked, “Why are you asking all these questions all of a sudden?”

I said, “Well, if anybody should ever ask me, then I should be able to answer, right?” He agreed. It was a half-truth. The other half of my motivation was my uncertainty about still believing what he taught me. I didn’t want him worrying about my shaking foundations, but I continued questioning, contemplating various theories, their general implications, and their specific meaning for me.

I was close to a moral crisis. I needed to make my own decision; to figure things out myself. So I prayed: *God, I’m sorry I am doubting, but if You are real, and You are there, and You care, please show me the way. Give me the answer. If You are all-powerful, You can show me and let me know that it was You who showed me. Someway, somehow, let me know without a doubt. Show me and make me believe it. I do not know how, but You can.*

I figured that if God was there, He would show me. If not, then I would not see Him: nothing enlightening would happen.

DOUBTS AND THEIR ANSWERS

Soon after that prayer I was sitting in bed, staring out my window at the beautiful day outside. I was thinking about the different issues bouncing around in my head. I was trying to reason: if evolution is true, it means that in the beginning there was nothing—specifically, no intelligence. Somehow, something happened to nothing. There was an explosion, or some sort of strong reaction in which nothing became a bunch of tiny little somethings. Scientists say they became inorganic elements. Then over millions of years tiny inorganic somethings assembled together with more inorganic somethings. Somewhere along the way they went from inorganic to organic. Science and scientists know that inorganic and organic are different. How does organic matter come about from inorganic matter? I don’t know! I don’t have the

I needed to make my own decision; to figure things out myself.

answer to that question. Science does not have the answer to that question.

But we'll suppose it for now. The organic, tiny, little somethings continued assembling, and even the inorganic somethings assembled with them. Then somehow, within the organic material, life happened. Before, there was just nonliving organic and inorganic material. But then, somehow, somehow, life happened. How? We don't know. At least to humans, it is inexplicable.

But we must think about it. I must think that as a human being, I am a compilation of organic and inorganic matter put together—with life. If, God forbid, I were to drop dead right now, I would have all my organic and inorganic materials here, assembled, but I would not have life. I could be in the most renowned scientific laboratory or hospital and no one could give me life.

To believe in macroevolutionary theory requires believing all these unexplainable, nonquantifiable, unqualifiable, unobservable things. I came to sense the faith it takes to believe in macroevolution. It was a real epiphany. I realized that evolution was not this hard science that I was choosing to refute. In terms of origins there is no science there. Macroevolutionary theory is a faith-based system. Though these events are unexplainable, I must believe they all took place as described. My choice was not science versus faith. It was faith versus faith!

But saying that they were both faith was not enough for me. Which faith was I going to believe in, and why? I looked at them both and saw that the Bible gives me reason to believe in it. It is an accurate source of history. People who do not believe in the Bible, who do not accept its religion, have found that the Bible is an accurate source of history, turning skeptical criticism to astonished admiration (the Hittites, Belshazzar, the journeys of Paul, etc.). Its prophecies come to pass, naming Cyrus and his military and political role long before his birth (Isa. 44:28; 45:1); enumerating Daniel's sequence of empires down to the present

day and the end of the world (Dan. 2; 7-9). I remember discovering in world history class in high school that students without biblical knowledge did not know that sequence.

THEN THERE'S JESUS

The Old Testament has more than 300 prophecies pointing to Jesus: the fact and unique nature of His origins and arrival on earth; the location and schedule of His birth, baptism, and death; even the nature of His betrayal.

A statistician once challenged his students to consider the probability that just eight of these prophecies could come to fruition in the life of one man. The probability of this taking place was 1:10¹⁷. The likelihood of 1:10¹⁷ is equivalent to (1) covering the entire state of Texas with silver dollars to a depth of two feet; (2) marking one of the coins; (3) blindfolding someone; and (4) sending that person to range across the state and pick out the marked silver dollar.¹

Despite thousands of years of distortion, distraction, and obfuscation by the enemy of truth, Jesus' existence is no longer a subject of historical dispute. Atheists, Muslims, Jews know of the historical reality, even though some choose their own interpretation of His ministry. Interestingly, some attempt to credit Him with greatness while rejecting His supernatural claims and dimensions. This is more than awkward. It is an utter impossibility. Either Jesus speaks the truth, or He is sickeningly arrogant when He identifies Himself as the exclusive way to God (John 14:6). Either He exists in inseparable unity with the eternal God, or He is mad to think or say so (John 10:30). Either He existed when Abraham was around (John 8:56), or He is a deluded buffoon. If He wouldn't and didn't rise again from the dead after three days He would be a manipulating liar to tell us so (Matt. 12:40). His enemies trembled at His resurrection prediction and tried to guard against it coming true because they knew He was a man of His word (Matt. 27:63-66). Their guard made

no difference when He was ready to rise because He is who He claims to be, the Son of God in power (Rom. 1:5).

AND THERE'S INFLUENCE

I cannot discuss the Bible's reliability without mentioning its impact on the lives that it has touched. My friend would say to me: "The power that the Bible has, it must be true." She was right. Not only have I heard stories. I have known its impact on my life.

Speaking negatively, people who dabble in the spiritual realm know that the supernatural exists, be it voodoo, Wicca, spiritualism, Eastern mysticism, etc., and know it has no power against the Word of God. Its power is the reason a handful of disciples, without modern technology and transportation, could spread the truth about Jesus Christ throughout the then-known world in one short life span (Col. 1:23). Most of them, so cowardly before (Matt. 26:55, 56; Mark 14:48-50), confronted and endured horrible deaths for the cause. They lost all fear when Jesus came out of the grave; and in the Bible we hear their voice of truth down the ages since: the truth as it is in Jesus.

While the Bible gives me reason to believe in it, some say that science gives reason to believe in macroevolution. However, the beauty and weakness of science is that what we believe to be true is true until it is proven to be false, and new textbooks must be written. My faith in science and the scientific method embraces true science that is observable. Science is great when interpreted and applied correctly. Innovation is often the good fruit of science applied. But the idea that science only supports macroevolution is incorrect.²

At the end of the day, creation and evolution both stand on faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God: the God seeker's pursuit is a faith pursuit (Heb. 11:6). Equally so, without faith it is impossible to support macroevolution. The evolution seeker's pursuit is a faith pursuit.

AFTER THE END

What is at stake for our choice between the Creator God and the nothing and accidents of evolution? If evolution is true, there is no God, everything is relative, self-satisfaction is as valid as any other option, and death takes me to oblivion, having lived as I pleased. If the God of the Bible is real, there are moral standards of right and wrong, Jesus is my salvation, and death is not the end. After a life of hope, faith, love, I look forward to resurrection day, when God gives me a new body and a life of eternal happiness in the company of my loving Savior.

Evolution invites: there are no consequences. God's Word urges: there is joy forevermore, now in service to Jesus, fellow humanity, and the earth for which I care, and then beyond all pain, sin, and death in the land of fadeless day.

I live in gratitude to God for the peace He has placed within me as He has brought me to understand better the value and significance of my choice for His way. The Lord God of the universe, the Creator of the universe, the Creator of all things good, cares about little me; and His answer to *my* prayer for understanding has given me a testimony that I shall ever bear for Him. I believe in science. I believe in God. I believe in Jesus. I believe in the Bible.

Sadly, illusions of happiness outside of God's will and the church lure many youth into partying and dreaming of living the "good life," such as that of celebrities attempting to drown out life's pain; attempting to fill the empty space in their brains that comes from thinking of themselves as a meaningless accident. But it is never too late to learn better. And it certainly is never too early. ♣

¹ Peter Winebrenner Stoner and Robert C. Newman, *Science Speaks: Scientific Proof of the Accuracy of Prophecy and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976).

² You may find the documentary *Evolution's Achilles' Heels* very helpful. It is a product of Creation Ministries International: creation.com.

Belliny Phaeton recently graduated from medical school. She wants to live for Jesus and meet Him in glory.



A GIFT FROM THE RIVER

Reaping the benefits of a divine plan

DONESHOR TRIPURA AS TOLD TO LORON WADE

It was such a completely ordinary day that I never expected it would become the most memorable day of my life. I was herding my father's water buffalo in southeastern Bangladesh. I had recently sat for my final high school examinations, and I was happy and relaxed, enjoying the natural beauty of the area with a friend.

The broad waters of the Chengi River flow by my father's pasture and the stream is clear and tranquil. Around noon I decided to slip into the water for a cooling dip when something caught my eye. I saw something floating on the water. The current brought this object directly to where I stood. It was a book floating half submerged in the water. On its cover were the words "*Pobitro Bibel!*"

CHANGES AHEAD

"Look!" I called to my friend who was watching from the bank of the river. "It says, 'Holy Bible!'" We were devoted followers of the Hindu gods, especially Radha and Krishna. Every morning and evening our family gathered to pray and place offerings on their altar. We fasted twice a month and observed the Durga Puja festival with its

◀ Doneshor Tripura

required offerings and animal sacrifices.

I had heard of the sacred Christian book, but I had never seen one. In fact, I had no desire to look at a Bible or know anything about it, but our parents had sown in our hearts a reverence for holy things. So when I saw the book, I thought, *If this is a holy book, I will take it out of the water and treat it with respect.* I found a place where I could lay it with its pages open to the sun so it would dry.

That evening the book was still damp, so I took it home and, without saying anything to my father, put it in a safe place. For the next three days I carried it with me, placing it in the sun and turning its pages so that they could dry completely.

After three days the Bible was dry, and I began reading it. I read about the Creator God who made everything in heaven and earth. I had read the Hindu scripture, the Gita, but I had never read such things.

I continued reading about the creation of Adam and Eve. The Gita says that the first humans were a husband and wife called Manu and Shataruba. I thought they must be the same individuals with different names. But then I read that the woman was created from part of the man, and when he saw her he joyfully said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23), a new and surprising idea to me.

One unforgettable day I read the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples (see Matt. 6:9-13). I thought, *Until now all my prayers have been selfish. I've done nothing but ask, ask, ask, wanting to get a benefit for myself and my family. Now I understand that the Christian concept of prayer is broad. It embraces the world.*

As I continued to read I discovered a God who invites people to accept His beautiful offer of salvation. He is patient, and He loves to forgive. My previous life had been an effort to earn the gods' favor by giving them expensive gifts and by long, exhausting works of appeasement. The rich people I knew could easily win the gods' approval. But for a poor family such as ours it was difficult to please the gods.

I studied the Gita more than ever in my desire to know the truth. I decided to mark everything in the Bible that was good and helpful with a red pencil and do the same with the Gita. In the Gita I found something to mark only occasionally; but in the Bible I ended up marking entire books.

I made two decisions: First, I decided to read no more in the Gita. Second, I understood that I must become a Christian, although I had no idea how or when that would take place. I had been studying the Bible for a year, and in all that time I had never met a Christian with whom I could talk about the things that were on my heart.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

About this time I left home to study at Raozan College in the city of Chittagong. As the pressure of my studies and other activities increased, I dedicated less time to spiritual searching. Five years passed rapidly, and I graduated and returned to my father's house.

I was helping with family responsibilities when one day I went to Khagrachari, a city about four miles (seven kilometers) from our village, where I met a friend from high school. I asked, "What are you doing now?"

"I work for a Christian church," he told me.

Great joy came into my heart when I heard this. "You're a Christian?" I asked.

"I'm a Seventh-day Adventist."

When we were away from the noisy market, I told him how the Bible had come to me on the river. Then I asked the question that had been so long on my heart: "How can I be a Christian?"

When I asked this, I saw great happiness on his face and he gave me a strong embrace. He told me that in Dighinala, about 15 miles (25 kilometers) from Khagrachari, there was a house of worship where I could receive instruction. He invited me to attend.

The next Saturday I went to Dighinala. When I went inside the building, the people were all sitting quietly with their eyes closed. I didn't know they were praying. I entered and sat by my friend, but I didn't shut my eyes. Instead, I looked around to see who was there. I liked what I saw. They appeared to be normal people.

I began to attend church in Dighinala, although I couldn't go every week because bus fare cost 35 takas (about 50 cents), and many times I didn't have enough money. But I had great joy in my heart, and I began to talk to my friends about what I was learning. Some of them wanted to go to Dighinala, too, so we agreed to take turns. Two or three of us would go every Sabbath with the money we could get together. Then the ones who had gone

Around noon I decided to slip into the water for a cooling dip when something caught my eye.

would teach the others what they had learned.

BACK TO THE RIVER

For a year we attended church this way. Then I told the pastor, Runat Orbin, that I wanted to be baptized.

The chapel in Dighinala has no baptismal font, so they told us that the baptism would be in the Chengi River. Tears came to my eyes when I realized that I would seal my covenant with God in the same river that had brought me the Bible.

I was baptized with 25 people in the clear waters of the Chengi River. That included seven of my friends whom I had invited. We were the very first Christians among the Tripura people.

I asked the pastor how I could learn more, so I could reach others with the story of Jesus.

He told me about the Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College and arranged for me to attend.

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

About a week after I received the Bible from the river, I was working at the house of one of my friends. I heard him speak angrily to his father, "Where's my Bible? Did you do something with it?"

"I threw it into the river," his father said. "If you keep reading that book, you'll become a Christian, and here we are all Hindus."

When I had a chance, I told my friend about the Bible that had come to me on the water.

"That's my Bible," he said. He told me he had received it after completing a correspondence course offered by the Baptists.

"I have it now," I told him.

"Keep it," he said. "I'm not interested anymore."

To this day he has shown no interest in studying the Bible, the book that changed my life forever. 📖

Doneshor Tripura studied at Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College near Gowalbathan Village, Gazipur District, Bangladesh. **Loron Wade** is a retired professor of theology living in Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.



GERARD VAN HONTHORST

OBSERVING CHRISTMAS

To honor Christ's birth is to rejoice in His ministry.

ELLEN G. WHITE

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. Luke 2:9, 10.

The 25th of December has long been commemorated as the day of Jesus' birth, and . . . it is not my purpose to affirm or question the propriety of celebrating this event on this day, but to dwell upon the childhood

and life of our Saviour. It is my purpose to call the attention of the children to the humble manner in which the Redeemer came to the world.

THE MANIFESTATION

All heaven was interested in the great event of Christ's advent to earth. Heavenly messengers came to make known the birth of the long-promised, long-expected Saviour to the humble shepherds who were watching their flocks by night on the plains of Bethlehem. The first

manifestation that attracted the notice of the shepherds at the birth of the Saviour was a radiant light in the starry heavens, which filled them with wonder and admiration. . . .

The astonished shepherds could scarcely comprehend the precious message borne to them by the angels, and when the radiant light had passed away, they said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child" (Luke 2:15-17). . . .

What matchless love Jesus has manifested for a fallen world! If angels sang because the Saviour was born in Bethlehem, shall not our hearts echo the glad strain, Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men?

Although we do not know the exact day of Christ's birth, we would honor the sacred event. May the Lord forbid that any one should be so narrow minded as to overlook the event because there is an uncertainty in regard to the exact time. Let us do what we can to fasten the minds of the children upon those things which are precious to everyone who loves Jesus. Let us teach them how Jesus came into the world to bring hope, comfort, peace, and happiness to all. . . . Let the hearts of all respond with exceeding joy for the priceless gift of the Son of God.—*Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1889.

GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15.

Last night the Christmas [Eve] celebration was held in the [Battle Creek] Tabernacle, and it passed off well—modestly, solemnly, and with gratitude expressed in everything done and said, because Jesus the Prince of Life had come to our world a babe in Bethlehem to be an offering for sin.

He came to fulfill the prediction of the prophets and seers, which He had instructed them to utter to fulfill the counsels of heaven, and in the great mission and work verify His own word. And for this, every soul is under the most solemn obligation and gratitude to God, that Jesus, the world's Redeemer, has pledged Himself to accomplish the

What matchless love Jesus has manifested for a fallen world!

full salvation of every son and daughter of Adam. If they do not accept the heavenly gift, they have only themselves to blame.

The sacrifice was ample, wholly consistent with the justice and honor of God's holy law. The Innocent suffered for the guilty, and this should call forth gratitude full and complete.

At half past ten [December 25] I spoke to those assembled at the Tabernacle. The Lord gave me most earnest words to speak. I tried to present the matter in the light of God's Word, that the work of labor for the salvation of souls does not rest alone upon the delegated minister, but that to every [person] God had given his work. The Lord's work is to be carried forward by the living members of Christ's body, and in the great divine appointment of God each one is to be educated to act a part in the conversion of souls. He has enlisted in the army of the Lord, not for ease, not to study his own amusement, but to endure hardships as a faithful soldier of the cross of Christ. Every private must act his part, be vigilant, be courageous, be true.

After I had occupied about fifty minutes, many excellent testimonies were borne.

We returned home and called to our dinner, Fred Walling, my niece's son, his wife, his wife's mother, and they came with their two little ones, a babe of three months, and a boy of six years. These were strangers and poor, and needed this little encouragement.—Manuscript 24, Dec. 25, 1889, diary. ♣

This excerpt was taken from *This Day With God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1979), pp. 360, 368. Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

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THE GREATEST GIFT

What could I say? After all, this had all been settled. We had made our choice. Or rather, it was made for us, and we had chosen to accept. Chosen to surrender. Chosen to stand with hands open, releasing our dreams and plans, while eagerly anticipating what God had in store.

Years ago the doctor's verdict of infertility had rocked our world, but that was long past. The tears we cried, the whispered prayers, the pain—that was all gone. Every day Greg and I had chosen to walk in acceptance of whatever the future held. That acceptance had brought peace and joy.

Time passed, and we were thankful for each day, excited about walking with God, about the possibilities of ministry and the joy of service. Then one year at 3ABN's camp meeting my world changed. I met two of the sweetest little girls. Blond hair, cute smiles. Somehow we connected. I visited with their mom, and we exchanged phone numbers.

Throughout the year they would text. Pictures of their animals or what they were involved in. Simple things; heart tugging. I was good for a while. After all, they were just two little girls who had somehow reached out. Precious, but at a distance.

Then, unexpectedly, everything changed. They had come for another camp meeting, and I was saying goodbye. As I reached out to hug Sarah,* someone spoke.

"Hey, Jill, are those your kids?" I looked up into an older woman's face. A camp

meeting attendee that I didn't know. She smiled. "They look just like you! Amazing! Are they yours?"

I couldn't answer. *God, I thought we were through this already. How could the pain come back again? What do I say?*

I cleared my throat while shaking my head. "No, they're not mine." *But I wish they were!* I needed to go somewhere, anywhere. Just to get away before she saw me cry.

The woman walked on, her idle curiosity met. Tears spilled over as I looked at Sarah's mom. *What would she think?*

As my eyes met hers, I paused. Unshed tears stood in her eyes too. She spoke, and at that moment I received the gift. I didn't deserve it, hadn't earned it, wasn't worthy. But still, it was offered, freely given.

"It's OK, Jill; you can say they're yours. You are, after all, their adopted mom."

I reached out and hugged her tightly. *Really? I can be a mom, God?*

On that day I received a title I never thought I'd have. The rightful owner gave it to me. Unmerited. Unearned. Longed for, but unasked.

I wonder about our Father in heaven and the title He freely offers: child of the King. Forgiven, accepted, beloved.

That is the greatest gift of all. ♣

*A pseudonym.

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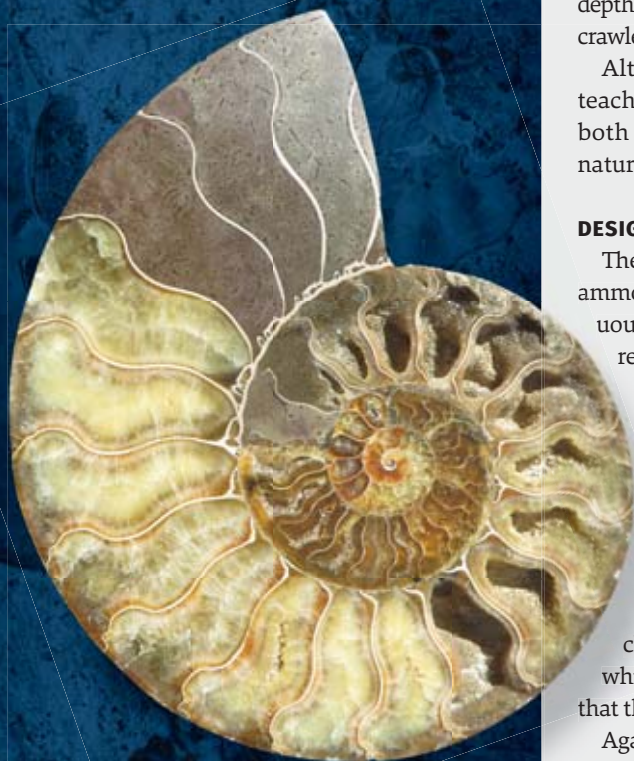
**JOURNEYS
WITH JESUS**
JILL
MORIKONE



**GREG AND I
CHOSE TO WALK
IN ACCEPTANCE
OF WHATEVER
THE FUTURE
HELD.**

LESSONS FROM AN AMMONITE

JIM GIBSON



The inside of an ammonite shell, showing the chambers, mostly filled with minerals. From Cretaceous sediments in Madagascar.

Ammonites once roamed the seas in huge numbers. No, not the ancient Ammonite tribe that descended from Lot and caused Israel so much trouble, but an extinct group of marine mollusks that resembled an octopus with a shell. The shell was usually spiral in form, with a diameter ranging from about 10 millimeters (less than a half inch) to 2 meters (about 6.5 feet) or more. Although they were once abundant, we would not have known of their existence except for the fossils they left behind.

Ammonites were a diverse group, with several thousand species. Most had shells in the form of a flat spiral, but a few had shells in a conical spiral or bent into other shapes. Some types swam at various depths in the ocean and fed on plankton, while others crawled on the seafloor and fed on small animals.

Although they are extinct, ammonites still teach important lessons. Ammonites illustrate both design and catastrophe, features seen in nature and explained by the Bible.

DESIGN IN BEAUTY

There is beauty in the spiral symmetry of the ammonite shell, with its curved form and continuously increasing radius. The spiral can be represented by a mathematical equation.¹ Perhaps this is one reason it is interesting to us. Symmetry and mathematics also contribute to beauty in many other organisms. For example, the circular form of many flowers reflects radial symmetry, and can also be represented by a mathematical equation.²

Why should our world have such interesting mathematical properties? Why isn't it chaotic? The answer comes from the way in which our world came into existence. We can see that the Creator is a superb mathematician.

Again, why should we find the ammonite shell to be interesting and beautiful? We do not observe other creatures admiring beautiful objects as humans do. Humans appear to have a unique capacity to appreciate beauty in symmetry, color,

Nature is constantly teaching.

pattern, texture, and other features. Our capacity to appreciate beauty is explained by the fact that we are made in the image of the Creator. The Creator loves beauty, as He made us to, and His loving generosity is demonstrated in His gift of both the capacity to appreciate beauty and the gratuitous beauty with which He filled His creation.

DESIGN IN FUNCTION

The inside of an ammonite shell is divided into chambers that are formed in succession as the animal grows. As the ammonite grows, its body becomes too big for the chamber it has been occupying, so it builds a new chamber, extending the spiral shell. This continues until there are many chambers, each larger than the preceding one, with the animal living in the largest, outermost chamber.

The outgrown chambers control the buoyancy of the shell. Each chamber is walled off by a solid partition, which prevents gas from entering, except through a tube that penetrates the chamber walls. By pumping gas through the tube, the animal is able to control its depth in the water. Without this elegant design, the ammonite would be limited to crawling on the seafloor. This system of buoyancy control does not look like an accident. It looks like the result of intentional, intelligent design. This example, along with many other features of living organisms, points to an intelligent Creator with unexcelled expertise in engineering.

Ammonites belong to a group of mollusks that includes octopus, squid, nautilus, and others. These creatures have complex eyes that are strikingly similar to human eyes. The basic shapes and functions are the same, although there are important differences in details.

Vision requires an extensive set of precisely crafted molecular components interacting in highly complex, regulated reactions. Such complex systems do not arise from unguided natural processes, but are known only to be products of engineering genius. This provides yet another illustration of God's creative power and expertise.

FROM ABUNDANCE TO EXTINCTION

Despite their former abundance, ammonites became extinct. What happened to them? It appears they were victims of the global flood described in Genesis. Once flourishing, they are now all gone.

What lessons can we gain from their disappearance?


First, there is the lesson of judgment. The earth had become so full of violence that God determined that the only way to preserve His plan to redeem His fallen creation was to intervene in judgment.

A second lesson is that what we see now is not permanent. What flourishes for a while may come to an end, regardless of how widespread and abundant it is.

Third, the innocent often suffer with the guilty. There is no reason to think that ammonites were evil in any way. They seem to have been harmless, but they suffered because of the actions of others. We also suffer because we live in an evil world that is desperately in need of redemption and restoration. We cannot conclude that someone has done wrong simply because things have gone badly for them. In evil, collateral damage is unavoidable.

LEARNING FROM AMMONITES

Ammonites teach us lessons of design and catastrophe that are relevant today. We live in a world that shows intelligent design in many features. Design in nature points us to a Creator, and the Bible reveals what that Creator is like. The Bible also helps us understand the evidence for catastrophe, God's judgment in the past. It also points us to the future judgment, in which God's people will be rescued and redeemed.

The lessons of the ammonite stand as both a promise and a warning that God cares for His creation and will eventually intervene to restore it to its original purpose. 

¹ Equation of a spiral is $r = ae^{b\theta}$. See any standard reference on calculus for the meaning of the symbols.

² Equation of a circle centered at the origin is $r^2 = x^2 + y^2$. Consult any standard reference for details.

Jim Gibson is director of the Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California.

THIS GLORIOUS TEMPLE

ROSANA ALVES

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14).

David's doxology about the wonder and beauty of the human body is one of the primary reasons we can justifiably believe in creation, as opposed to the incredible notion that life as we know it happened by chance. Each of our five senses—sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing—demonstrate the marvel of God's creative power.

Take the brain, for example. The brain is complex and fantastic. Much more than a heap of communicating cells, it brings meaning to life; it allows us to think about the past, learn new things, and build the future. This incredible organ tells us who we are, what we feel, and how we can be happy. It governs our existence in a wonderful way.

The brain's circuitry is composed of about 86 billion nerve cells. At birth the brain already has most of the neurons that define what it means to be an individual. By the second year of life, a child's brain is 80 percent the size of an adult brain.

Scientists admit that they are far from unraveling all its mysteries. Check out one of its capabilities by reading the jumble that follows:

Our bodies are incredibly complex, yet remarkably easy to care for.

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ONGOING CAPACITY FOR LEARNING

The brain's fascinating abilities do not stop there. Did you know a woman's brain grows after giving birth? Hormonal changes that occur after a baby's birth are responsible for the anatomical changes observed in regions involving reasoning, motivation, and emotion. The main altered areas are: hippocampus (learning and memory), hypothalamus (associated with maternal motivation and feeling), substantia nigra and amygdala (reward and emotional processing), parietal lobe (sensory integration) and prefrontal cortex (reasoning and decision-making). Such changes give women a better ability to care for their newly born babies.¹

In addition to controlling various functions of our bodies, such as food intake, sleep, and body temperature, the brain is also an expert in the task of making decisions. You may be thinking, *We already know that the decisions we make come from brain processes. What's new?*

What's new is appreciating the elaborate analysis of situations required for making decisions. For example, deciding whether to accept a new job offer is performed by the prefrontal cortex (a portion of the brain located in the forehead region). Scientists at the University of Oxford have identified a portion of the prefrontal cortex that appears to be unique in humans. This area, called the lateral frontal pole of the prefrontal cortex, has been associated with strategic planning and decision-making as well as with multitasking. This area is exclusive in humans,

without anything that corresponds to it in animals.²

REST: THE MIRACLE PRESCRIPTION

An adult human brain weighs about three pounds (2 percent of a person's body weight), yet it is capable of processing an infinite number of actions, calculations, emotions, and situations. For maximum performance the brain's needs are quite simple: nutrition, water, oxygen, and rest. Let's talk about rest.

Did you know that not getting enough sleep can be as detrimental to our brains as drinking alcohol? Studies at Stanford University found that people who stayed awake for 19 hours made more mistakes in attention tests than people with 0.8 grams of alcohol in their blood, a quantity equivalent to four glasses of beer, three glasses of wine, or three glasses of whiskey.³

That same study evaluated tomography scans of the brains of sleep-deprived young people and identified a reduction in brain activity that affects the frontal cortex (involved in decision-making, planning, and execution of tasks) and the cerebellum (responsible for motor coordination). This and many other studies only prove what we already know: quality sleep is essential for health in general and brain health in particular.

Yet research confirms that between 30 and 50 percent of the world's population suffers from insomnia.⁴

A good night's sleep is essential for the body, especially for the brain. While we sleep our bodies produce hormones, neurotransmitters are synthesized, and energy for activities is restored. Long-term, unsatisfactory rest tends to result in psychiatric, neurological, or other disorders such as restless leg syndrome, teeth grinding, sleep apnea, etc.

Melatonin, a hormone produced by the pineal gland and involved with various neurotransmitter systems, is considered the "sleep hormone" because it works to lower blood pressure, glucose levels,

SIX STEPS TO BETTER SLEEP

- » Decrease consumption of stimulants, such as caffeine and nicotine. Alcohol, despite its reputation for relaxation, disrupts sleep, because it tends to lead to snoring and frequent awakening.
- » Practice physical activity no more than four hours before going to bed. Exercise stimulates body and mind.
- » Making notes of your concerns before bedtime helps to get them off your mind, making it easier to sleep.
- » Avoid watching television or using the computer in bed. The light from their screens stimulates the brain and inhibits the release of melatonin.
- » Put your cell phone someplace other than next to your bed. Your brain interprets its presence as your need to be alert.
- » Maintain a routine with regular sleeping and waking hours, even on weekends.

and body temperature, allowing the body to relax. But when artificial light strikes the retina at night the optic nerves “warn” the brain that it is time to wake up, suppressing the production of melatonin.

And while melatonin production decreases by nighttime exposure to light, cortisol levels increase. Cortisol acts to keep our bodies awake and active and is closely related to the way we respond to stress, increased body fat, risk of diabetes, joint inflammation, etc.

The relationship of sleep to brain health is just as significant to other aspects of our health and well-being. Consider these factors:

The less we sleep, the greater our chance for cancer. Women exposed to a higher intensity of artificial night light have a greater chance of developing breast cancer. The involvement of melatonin with the female hormones perhaps explains these results. When melatonin is suppressed, important hormonal changes occur, making women more vulnerable to cancer.⁵

Lack of sleep affects the immune system. The increase of cortisol produced during the night because of exposure to artificial light (even at low intensity) increased the vulnerability of rats to diseases in general, especially when the light was blue. The results can also be applied to humans.⁶

Little sleep is linked with early aging and neurodegenerative diseases. Melatonin has antioxidant

properties that are essential for preventing the body’s cells from damaging changes.

Sleep deprivation impairs decision-making. The prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain involved in communication, innovation, and evaluation, decreases in activity when exposed to sleep deprivation.⁷

Sleep deprivation decreases emotional intelligence and creativity. Subjects deprived of sleep for as many as 56 hours demonstrated a noticeable decrease in empathy, assertiveness, and impulse control. Positive and abstract thinking is also hindered.

WONDERFUL INDEED

Our life experiences are infinite and indescribable. And all our experiences are processed through our brains. No wonder David spoke about being fearfully and wonderfully made.

The care we take to experience life in its fullness is as basic as eating simple, nutritious food; getting adequate exercise; and enjoying ample rest. Not only will we enjoy life as God intends it, we will have strength, energy, and vigor to be a blessing to those around us.

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I'm not your typical Sabbathkeeper.

It's not that I'm unfamiliar with the concept. Raised a Seventh-day Adventist, I walked away from the church and its Sabbathkeeping rituals in my early 20s. That was during a time of life when I was going through a "Rumspringa"—as Amish kids do.

Why did I leave Sabbath and my church behind? Partly rebellion. Partly because of legalism. Partly because I was weary of trying (and failing) to be "good."

Several years later I was planted in church once again—but this time on Sunday mornings with my own family. Sabbathkeeping was no longer on my radar.

But that changed.

I won't relate the entire process of change, but

I will emphasize two things: (1) I was probably the most reluctant Sabbathkeeper in the world when I started, and (2) I have grown so much in my Christian walk since making the commitment to keep the Sabbath that it still blows me away.

HOW HAVE THINGS CHANGED?

Here are just a few of the ways:

I'm calmer and less frantic—not just from sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night, but throughout the entire week.

My faith is stronger than it has been since a particular period in my childhood, when it was at its very strongest.

Strongholds are falling away. Things in my life that I've struggled with for decades—some since as long as I can remember—are becoming areas of growth for me.

My family is happier. Although not everyone in my immediate family observes Sabbath, it still ends up being a day in which we spend more quality time together: quality time equals less time

SABBATH-KEEPING IS CHANGING MY LIFE

“doing your own thing” media-wise, and more time making eye contact and talking with each other.

Sabbath reminds me what life is really all about. I have been a Christian for most of my life, but I have often felt as if I were just going through the motions, trying to “do good” on my own steam. God uses Sabbath rest to center and ground me, to help me refocus and become renewed.

I’m still a very imperfect Christian, and I have an incredibly long and challenging walk ahead of me to grow my faith and make it stronger. But I no longer feel as if I’m holding on to life by my fingertips. The day-to-day schedule is no longer as frantic and overwhelming, because I know that even though this morning or evening or week is crazy-busy, I am going to be resting soon. It reminds me, too, that God has it all under control even when I don’t. I find great comfort in that.

HOW A SABBATH REST CAN HELP CREATIVES

As a writer I’ve discovered that a weekly rest is just what I need to rejuvenate my work; and I expect

that other creatives would find the same to be true for them. Even for those who are not believers, the Sabbath can help them to find fresh starts and new beginnings as well. Sabbathkeeping can inject a new vision or perspective into a project we’ve been struggling with, or perhaps just give our souls a time to rest, to be quiet, and to enjoy ourselves without having to be “on task” or producing anything.

If you have not been keeping the Sabbath as fully as you should, ask yourself, *Am I willing to try a Sabbath rest experiment?* If so, start with whatever you can handle, or challenge yourself to spend time resting with the Lord for a full 24-hour period. Then consider: How did it feel? What did you observe? Did taking this break recharge you?

This experiment will likely change your life and strengthen your relationship with the Savior—just as it did mine. 📌

Joy Choquette is a freelance writer living in Vermont. She blogs about creativity, the Holy Spirit, and finding the small blessings in life at www.joychoquette.com.



But it took me awhile to get here.

TWO OR THREE OR 12 WISE MEN

And did they walk, or ride?

CARLOS OLIVARES

Every year at Christmas we meet them again: three Wise Men, no less, no more. But what do we really know of them?

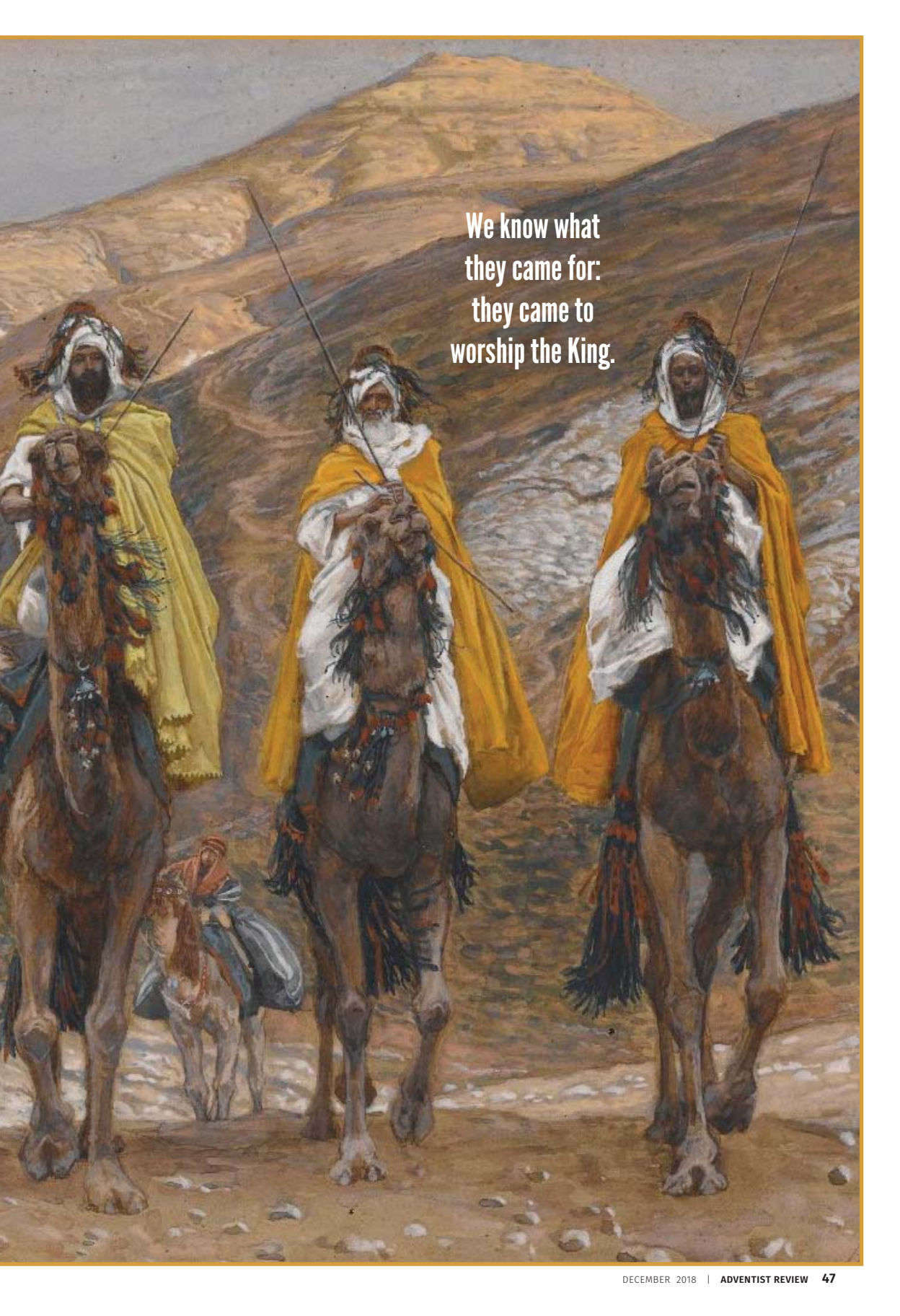
WHO OR WHAT ARE MAGOI?

Matthew's Greek calls them *magoi* (Matt. 2:1; plural of *magos*), which Bible translations render as "wise men" or "magi." When the word appears again in the New Testament, most translate it "sorcerer" or "magician" (Acts 13:6-8). The contrast between Matthew's seekers for Jesus and Bar-Jesus the false prophet in the Cyprian town of Paphos, "full of all kinds of deceit and trickery" (verse 10), could hardly be more startling. The contrasting meanings of *magos*

both appear in classical Greek literature. Bar-Jesus and Matthew's *magoi* are valid examples of each one. The *magoi* are the polar opposite to the Cyprian fake minister Bar-Jesus, "child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right" (verse 10). They are more awake to the biblical scrolls than the [half-]Jewish king Herod and his Torah experts. Because they are open to His voice God uses them to save His Son from the vile and murderous monarch Herod.

Matthew does not use the term, but we call them "three kings of Orient." Where does the royal epithet originate? Third century Christian writer Tertullian (died c. A.D. 240) notes that people from the East regarded the





We know what
they came for:
they came to
worship the King.



One of the earliest-known depictions of the Magi from a fourth century Roman sarcophagus.

Wise Men “almost” as kings (*Adversus Marcionem*, 3. 13. 8),¹ while two Eastern noncanonical works from the sixth century A.D., the *Cave of Treasures* (Fol. 40*b*. Col. 2) and the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* (5. 10) show that the bridge has been crossed from almost royal to established as such. Western Christianity (the Roman church) does not move quite as fast. Caesarius, bishop of Arles (died A.D. 542), preached a sermon openly assuming the Wise Men’s royalty (Sermon 139). But not until the tenth century did artistic representations begin to show crowns on their heads.²

There is a suggestion that Isaiah and the ancient psalmist may have contributed in this regard: the psalmist’s description of kings coming from Eastern regions, and the prophet Isaiah’s reference to Eastern rulers bearing gold and frankincense combine to serve as biblical support for the developing tradition. For the psalmist, the kings bring presents to the king’s son (Ps. 72:1, 10, 11); for Isaiah their riches are gifts presented when God’s glory appears upon His people (Isa. 60:3, 6).

The interpretations of royalty, though invoking biblical texts, are not necessarily biblically validated. Matthew 2:11 is not confirmed as a fulfillment of a prophecy in Isaiah 60:6 simply because both these verses mention gold and frankincense. A key element in determining such prophetic fulfillment is how the New Testament author uses the Old Testament material.

Matthew, who quotes from the Old Testament abundantly, has nothing to say about any biblical passage applied to the Wise Men. This is particularly

instructive because so many of his Old Testament quotations focus on the Nativity story. Matthew is explicit: Jesus’ birth announcement (Matt. 1:22, 23) is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prediction of a virgin conceiving (Isa. 7:14). Joseph’s coming up out of Egypt after God sent him there to preserve the Baby Jesus’ life (Matt. 2:13-15) is a fulfillment of Hosea’s prediction that God would call His son from Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Rachel’s disconsolate weeping for her children (Jer. 31:15) is fulfilled in the wailing of Jewish mothers after Herod slaughters all infants and toddlers under 2 years old to make sure he gets rid of the Baby born King of the Jews (Matt. 2:17, 18).

Thus, Matthew’s silence concerning any predictive significance or prophetic realization vis-à-vis Isaiah 60 or Psalm 72 is telling, and Psalm 72 and Isaiah 60 are reasonably dismissed as unwarranted importation of biblical information, in relation to the activity and royal identity of Matthew’s *magoi*.

If we accept Matthew’s regular acknowledgments of social status—centurion (Matt 8:5; 27:54), soldier (Matt. 8:9; 27:27), priest (Matt. 21:15), scribe (Matt. 2:4; 8:19), Pharisee (Matt. 3:7; 12:2), governor (10:18; 27:2), king (2:1, 3, 9)—we should be willing to do the same with *magoi* (verses 1, 7, 16). As stated, the term signals educated people working as dream interpreters or state counselors: these are wise men, not kings.

THREE MEN OR THREE GIFTS

Early Christian theologian Origen (died A.D. 253) is the first known to state that the wise men were three (Holikies on Genesis and Exodus 14), though

the range of their number spans from as few as two to as many as 12.³ Helped on by several sermons from Pope Leo I on the Wise Men (Sermons 31, 33, 34, 36), consensus on their number eventually conformed to the number of their gifts. As with status, Matthew did care about numbers—two demon possessed men (Matt. 8:28), 12 disciples (Matt. 10:1; 11:1), two blind men (Matt. 9:27), 4,000 males (Matt. 15:38). But he never found it necessary to state the number of Wise Men. Also, he knows about names—his chapter 1 genealogy is witness enough, including Mary, Joseph, and Emmanuel.

But he is not to be associated with any naming of Wise Men that tradition has thrown up: Hormizdadh, Izgarad, Perozadh, from a Syrian legend (Cave of Treasures, Fol. 40b. Col. 2); Tanisuram, Maliko, and Zesesba, an Ethiopic story (The Conception and Birth of our Lady Mary 17); Ator, Sator, and Petatoras;⁴ Enoch, Melchizedek, and Elijah, descended from heaven to visit the baby Jesus;⁵ Bithisarea, Melchior, and Gathaspa, from a fifth-century Greek work translated into Latin in the eighth century (*Excerpta Latina Barbari*, 51b, 25); or, ultimately, thanks to the sixth-century *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, the triumphant trio, Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthazar.

THE IMPORTANT THING

Matthew was less concerned with names, numbers, and status. But one thing was essential. Principal and paramount was his story about Jesus and the salvation He brings. As the messenger from heaven instructs Joseph, Mary is not to be put away: “She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Names and numbers, status and race, have preoccupied the minds of people interested in the Jesus story. Between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a Black *magos* entered the story, perhaps because someone wanted to emphasize its universal significance. Ironically, he joined three men with White European features, a geographical conundrum that seriously challenges their biblical origins.

But distortions on appearance one way or another, whether gently racist or nobly globalist, were no minutest part of Matthew’s concerns. Bearded or clean-shaven, ancient or juvenile, White or Black, are not elements of his story. His apathy regarding these issues suggests a narrative goal not

centered not in race or aesthetics, but in people’s transformation once they are privileged to engage with Jesus. Irrespective of race or age or stature or skin color, the woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:22), the man of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32), and the *magoi* from the East all receive the blessing that matters because they get to be with Jesus, whom Matthew shows to be the hope of Israel and Messiah of the ages, the royal son of David who is the seed of father Abraham (Matt. 1:1).

The manner of their travel is no more consequential a matter for Matthew than the color of their skin: they may have walked 18 to 23 miles per day; or, as in the greeting cards and the movies, they may have ridden camels covering as much as 93 miles per day. Their arrival date may or may not have been January 6, celebrated in so many Latin American households and many places elsewhere around the globe as the day kids receive their gifts, the *día de los Reyes Magos* (Day of the Magi Kings). We have no documentation of it. That date’s calculation depends on another mere tradition, the actual day of Jesus’ birth, December 25, for neither do we have any confirming documentation of this.

Because so much of the story of the *magoi* we call Magi remains undocumented, details that are included assume compelling power: we aren’t given their names, their number, nor their date of arrival. But we know where they came from—they were Gentiles from the East (Matt. 2:1); we know where they came to—to the place where the child was (verse 9); we know what they came for—they came to worship the King (verse 2). And that knowledge is both global and personal enough for me to process.

Do I know where I’m from? Do I know where I’m going? Am I in tune with the wisdom and dedication of those ancient Eastern sages? And am I on my way to worship the King? 🦋

¹ Classical literature sources are here acknowledged without recourse to exhaustive citation.

² Abel Fabre, *Pages d’art chrétien* (Paris: Bonne Presse, 1910), pp. 79–81.

³ Jeffrey Spier, *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 181; *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum 2; The Book of the Bee*, p. 39; Walter Lowrie, *Christian Art and Archeology* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), p. 212.

⁴ Isaac Casauboni, *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI* (Francfort, 1615), p. 137.

⁵ Jacques d’Auzoles, *L’Épiphanie, ou Pensées nouvelles à la gloire de Dieu, touchant les trois Mages* (Paris: Alliot, 1638), pp. 243–245, 276.

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ROOM AT THE INN

Implications for the spirit of Christmas the rest of the year

DIXIL RODRÍGUEZ

I look out the window. If I squint the lampost disappears, and it looks as if the moon is shining over the falling snow. Tonight the heavens are decorating the mountaintops. Tonight my dear friend Lisa and her 6-year-old son, JD, will arrive for the holidays.

Between baking and preparing dinner, I glance through the window again, and see two figures exiting the apartment leasing office: *a woman holds a small child's hand, both carry plastic bags. What are they doing out in the snow? A storm is coming.*

I run outside to the leasing office in time to see the agent pack up, ready to leave. She tells me the mother and child are homeless. "They want shelter. They're tired and hungry, so I sent them to the big shelter in Salt Lake."

Salt Lake? Twenty miles away? In socks and no coat I run after them. Maybe it's against my better judgment; maybe I know Lisa will soon be here. I meet the strangers: Margo and her son, Michael. I take the plastic bag that Michael is carrying. *I have a place where they can stay during the storm.*

Once at home, they are comfortable in the room I prepared for Lisa. They settle into the room with two small twin beds. My small two-bedroom, two-bath apartment fits us all.



A six-year-old who remembers what it feels like to not have any gifts and wants to share what he has.

Just as I close one door I run to open another: “Merry Christmas!” I hug JD remembering how small he was two years ago. When I hug Lisa, I whisper, “You’re going to kill me, but . . .” She hugs me tighter and laughs: “Yeah, yeah. I saw it. No worries. Everyone’s home.”

That night after dinner Lisa makes a bed for JD so he can sleep under the Christmas tree lights while she sleeps on the sofa bed close by. While we are enjoying the tree lights and the holiday music, Margo emerges, wet hair, wearing a familiar robe, holding a trash bag. She is apologetic and speaks softly.

“May I wash these in the kitchen sink?” she asks.

I don’t understand, but Lisa steps in. “There’s a washer and dryer in the hall closet: let me help you.” Lisa’s hospitality is unique. For her everything is a simple act of kindness in practical life.

JD and Michael walk around the tree looking at ornaments. They pretend ornaments are train cars, lining them on the floor. I sit at a distance from the play zone with Lisa and Margo and listen. Lisa is telling Margo her story: one day her husband left, along with her two grown daughters; all moved to Montana. She was left with the baby, JD, to care for. At the same time I was receiving news about being ill and confronting the fact that I was alone. We were friends, but out of financial necessity, moving into this apartment together seemed to make sense. Lisa worked nights; I worked days. We shared responsibilities and took care of JD.

Margo listens and takes a deep breath. “A week ago my husband told me that he had another family in east Utah, and that he was moving there without me. Michael was left in my care. We had no home and few belongings, and we packed clothes in plastic bags and went to a shelter. There was no room.” The first night they slept in someone’s backyard. Desperate, they walked around and found this apartment complex, offered the leasing agent cleaning services for the possibility to sleep in the lobby for two nights. Turned away, she was willing to walk to Salt Lake City. She looks at Michael and says, “I need a plan.”

Lisa walks around the Christmas tree. “Boys, do you know what this tree is missing?” The three huddle together, whisper, giggle, and make a plan to find the “missing item” tomorrow. They high-five one another before parting ways. I help prepare the sofa bed: “Did you know Michael is 6 years old too?” Lisa stops unwrapping a blanket and looks at me as if she knows exactly what Margo must be feeling.

Keeping our voices quiet, Lisa and I catch up. I hear about JD’s new school, her new job, an equestrian ranch she inherited in northern California where an annual camp for autistic children is offered. Her daughters have joined her in California. *In two years God has changed our lives.*

Our conversation eventually arrives at an important intersection: *Do we have anything to share with Margo and Michael for Christmas?* Tomorrow we are taking the boys to the mall. Maybe we can find something there. We focus on what they need: *Coats. Basic winter clothes? How do we buy these unexpected gifts?*

I walk to the small table where mail is placed and reach for a card from my mother. I open the card, remove a check, and place it next to us. I glance at Mom’s Christmas card, now resting over the fireplace with cards from friends—*three kings, virgin Mary, Baby Jesus*—and carefully open my writing desk drawer. I hand Lisa an envelope with the cashed check that arrived with my mother’s card.

Lisa looks at me: “Are you sure?”

Yes, I’m sure.

The trip to the mall is scheduled, and we are ready to go! But Margo is emptying the dishwasher.

She would like to avoid the crowded mall and will prepare a late lunch for us. She appears happy to have a purpose. I wonder if a crowded mall during the holiday season would remind her of what she cannot provide for Michael this year.

Christmas is on Sunday. On Thursday, against my better judgment, I am in a mall full of people who have no holiday cheer. We let the boys pick out coats, then search for one just for Margo. A few purchases later we head home. The drive is pleasant; we sing Christmas carols. I watch JD and Michael sing together as if they are old friends. By the time we arrive home warm food welcomes us and compliments for the chef abound. Sitting in the dining room, we *are* family.

Thursday night Lisa and I wrap gifts. A small knock on the door interrupts us: JD. He sits on the bed and asks: "These are gifts for Margo and Michael. Your gifts. But what about *my gift* for Michael? He doesn't have any toys. Can I share?"

We stand still, as if JD has uttered something profound. A 6-year-old who remembers what it feels like to not have any gifts and wants to share what he has. In our efforts to provide what was needed, we forgot about the simplicity of a *gift*, particularly for a child. JD exits quietly, and as if on a sprint, Lisa helps me separate boxes.

Early Friday morning I wake up listening to JD knocking on everyone's bedroom door. Apparently there are gifts under the tree for Christmas Day!

The weekend flies by. On Friday afternoon we attend a university performance of *Messiah*. Margo cries as the choir sings. *Has music stirred memories somewhere inside of better times? holidays without sorrow?* I know that stirring. It arrives at unexpected times.

On Friday evening we break bread together as a strong storm covers the entire valley with icy snow, leaving us stranded in the apartment. We spend Sabbath together. Close to bedtime Lisa makes a ceremony out of the fact our tree will *now* be "complete." JD and Michael stand on chairs, little hands reach high and place a star at the top of the tree. After a countdown, the star shines bright. We all clap as if it's the most beautiful star we've ever seen. *Because it is.*

The boys are awake very early Sunday morning. Christmas carols play in the background. Lisa has

converted the living room into a gift-sharing area. Gifts are sorted by name. Margo and Michael stare at one another as packages are placed in front of them.

As wrapping paper flies all over the living room, gifts are shared. This is far from the quiet Christmas Day I expected, yet somehow perfect. As the boys play, Margo pulls Lisa and me into the kitchen. She is grateful for everything. She is amazed at how quickly a bad situation has been turned around, giving her hope. From her pocket she takes out two molds. *It looks like a flour mold. Baked?* On it are two sets of handprints, and underneath each a signature from Michael and JD. *This is a precious gift.*

As we talk, Lisa whispers: "Margo, I have an idea about your situation . . ."

Hours later I take a moment alone to sit under the tree, near the fireplace. As I glance at the star shining on the tree, I pray in gratitude for the warmth of the hearth and hearts in our little home.

The following evening I help Lisa pack. She casually hands me an envelope. I shake my head. *We were in this together! If my mother knew how I used her gift, she would be so happy!* Lisa stops packing. "Look, you taught me about helping others when I couldn't even feed JD. These experiences land at *your* doorstep! I am honored to help her a few steps further." She hands me the envelope, again, and I shake my head again.

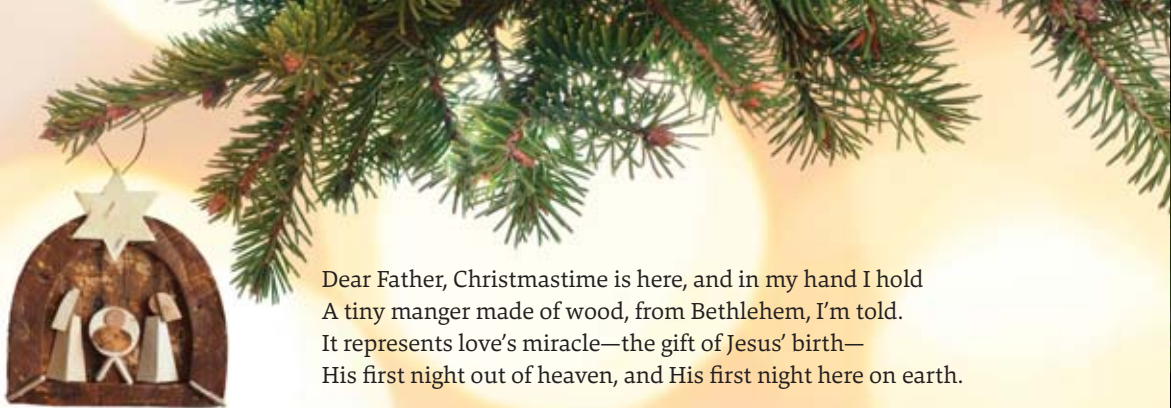
"Fine! I'll give it to her when we get to her destination," she laughs, wiping away tears. I recognize how much loss, difficulties, joy, and precious lessons were shared in this space. *Sometimes lessons surpass the seasons of the calendar.*

In the morning the car is packed. Lisa and JD are driving to California via Idaho. Margo's family is in Idaho, and the offer to be with her parents and sisters was well received. *I know they will be safe in the journey.* Still, it's difficult to let them go. *A quiet apartment awaits.*

That night I sleep under the tree, watching the lights, amazed at how bright the star is. I stare at a card of Jesus on the manger. *No room at the inn.*

How much have I learned from that story? How much more is left to learn? ♣

Dixie Rodriguez, a university professor and volunteer hospital chaplain, lives in Texas.



TREASURES FOR GOD'S CHRISTMAS TREE

LORRAINE
HUDGINS-OLSON

Dear Father, Christmastime is here, and in my hand I hold
A tiny manger made of wood, from Bethlehem, I'm told.
It represents love's miracle—the gift of Jesus' birth—
His first night out of heaven, and His first night here on earth.

'Twill hang upon my Christmas tree with other things I prize—
Some ribbon from my wedding flowers, two monarch butterflies;
A golden curl, a napkin ring, a love note from my son,
A family snapshot, baby shoes, a badge my daughter won.

And God, please do forgive me, but I'm sure You've saved a few
Small treasures from Your children that mean everything to You.
They'd look so lovely on Your tree in heaven's best location
Aglow with some 10,000 stars, left over from Creation.

There's Gideon's fleece, two turtle doves, the mites a widow gave,
A broken alabaster box You prized enough to save,
The tiny needle Dorcas used still with a strand of thread,
And there's a basket from the lad who gave his fish and bread.

A sling You placed in David's hands to conquer Israel's foe,
The ax head—though it's heavy, You will know where it should go.
A little cruse of oil You blessed to last a famine through,
And Moses' battered rod—he tried so hard to be like You!

And then, around that lovely tree, You may just want to drape
The scarlet cord that Rahab used to help Your spies escape.
These gifts all seem so meager, Lord, but in Your hands I know
They'll look most exquisite and grand, because You love us so.

Then on that topmost branch could You please place Your brightest Star—
The one that led the Magi bearing treasures from afar?
The shepherds followed it and found—gift-wrapped in swaddling clothes
And gilded with Your heartstrings—their Messiah in repose.

'Twas tagged "With Love, From God to Mankind" by Your own sweet touch.
Did angels chip in with You, God? It cost so very much!
With joyful tears I give my heart. Lord, I have nothing more!
Please take it—it's the only thing You've ever asked me for.

And Father, may that Star that led the Wise Men from the East
Still shine to guide us on our path, till earth's dark night has ceased.
Make us reflectors of Your light from Christmas long ago,
And may Your Christmas Day be bright, because we love You so. ❧

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PLEASE DON'T CANCEL CHRISTMAS!

*How to celebrate
Christmas without
going into debt*

I was sitting in a restaurant enjoying lunch when I heard a woman and her friend discussing Christmas. Overhearing that conversation changed my whole perspective on Christmas.

“I don’t allow my children to give me a list of what they want for Christmas. Gifts are determined by the giver. I’m not their personal shopper. So I make a point to stay tuned to their likes and dislikes, and I choose what they get for Christmas.”

TOUGH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

I know that may sound hard-nosed, but it struck a chord in my soul. I love giving gifts—and wrapping them. I’ve considered hiring myself out during my retirement for the Christmas season at a department store so I can wrap to my heart’s content.

In spite of that, Christmas for me began to feel more like an “exchange of merchandise” rather than a time of true, sincere, gift giving. The time came when one of my gift recipients looked at me and said, “Wrong size,” then expected me to return it to get the right



size. That was when I realized that I was tired of the personal shopper business.

Of course it's fine to want your children to give you a wish list! But a wish list is not a "demand list." I've seen too many children throw temper tantrums because their parents did not get the correct size, shape, or color of their cherished desire. And many parents feel obligated to go into debt to fulfill these wishes. Christmas 2017 was memorable for many people, but for more than 40 percent of Americans it was memorable because they went into debt for \$1,054.¹ This is certainly not what the spirit of Christmas is all about.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

People around the world have observed Christmas with religious and secular traditions for two

millennia. Christians celebrate Christmas as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus, even though many of us are aware that He wasn't born on that day. Even before the time of Christ, Europeans celebrated the winter solstice of December 21 as marking the passing of the worst of the winter. In Germany people honored the pagan god Odin, who they believed flew through the sky and decided who of his people would perish or prosper. Sound familiar? Around the time of the winter solstice, Romans observed Juvenalia, a feast honoring the children of Rome. Members of the Roman upper class celebrated the birthday of Mithra, the god of the unconquerable sun, on December 25, as the most sacred day of the year.²

After being reminded of this piece of history, you may be asking yourself, *Why in the world are Christians celebrating a pagan holiday?* You're not alone. In 1645, when Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan forces took over England, they canceled Christmas. And from 1659 to 1681 the celebration of Christmas was outlawed in Boston.³ However, in the early nineteenth century, during a time of societal conflict and turmoil in America, Christmas was reinvented. Americans changed it from a decadent and raucous holiday to a family-centered day of peace and nostalgia. In June 1870 Christmas was declared a Federal holiday in the United States.

In the 1880s Ellen White wrote an article about the observance of Christmas.⁴ While she cites her cautions and concerns, she also shares her strong belief that the celebration of Christmas can be beneficial for Christians, and that we do not have to cancel Christmas. The Christmas spirit can serve very good purposes—especially for youth: "Youth cannot be made as sedate and grave as old age, the child as sober as the sire. While sinful amusements are condemned, as they should be, let parents, teachers, and guardians of youth provide in their stead innocent pleasures, which shall not taint or corrupt the morals. Do not bind down the young to rigid rules and restraints that will lead them to feel themselves oppressed and to break over and rush into paths of folly and destruction."⁵

Ellen White took the position that placing an evergreen in a church could be a blessing, in spite of those whose minds may not receive the blessing or who would turn their minds to other things. It could be a place where small offerings are to be placed to benefit God's work: "[God's] cause cannot

Christmas should be a time of joyful celebration.

go forward without your aid. Let the gifts you have usually bestowed upon one another be placed in the Lord's treasury. . . . In every church let your smaller offerings be placed upon your Christmas tree. Let the precious emblem, 'evergreen,' suggest the holy work of God and His beneficence to us; and the loving heart-work will be to save other souls who are in darkness. Let your works be in accordance with your faith."⁶

While our primary focus during this holiday time should be to remember Christ and His gift to us, sharing with others can be a joyous time: "While urging upon all the duty of first bringing their offerings to God, I would not wholly condemn the practice of making Christmas and New Year's gifts to our friends. It is right to bestow upon one another tokens of love and remembrance if we do not in this forget God, our best friend. We should make our gifts such as will prove a real benefit to the receiver."⁷

JOY AND MONEY IN THE BANK

Christmas can and should be a time of joyful celebration. The challenge is not to get caught up in the commercialism and materialism that has taken over the holiday in our society. It's a perfect time to practice faithful stewardship with our time, abilities, and possessions, and to model it to our children.

WHAT TO DO

So what can we do to make Christmas "the most wonderful time of the year"? Here are a few suggestions:

1 Create special holiday traditions. I don't remember all the gifts I've received over the years, but I remember the times I spent with family and friends caroling to the firefighters at the local firehouse, singing with our friends at our annual Christmas party, anticipating my mother-in-law's delicious Christmas dinners. What special memories can you make with your family?

2 Have a Plan. Your first plan is a budget. Stick to it. Last Christmas the majority of Americans

didn't stick to their budgets, with 74 percent saying they underestimated costs. A budget form (www.nadstewardship.org/site/1/docs/monthlybudget.pdf), and a master gift list (christmas.organized-home.com/printable/christmas-planner/master-gift-list) can go a long way toward helping you this time around. Whether it's finances or food, a plan helps keep the wallet and the waist in check! (Trust me: I know the experience.)

3 Save. If you start right after Christmas and save \$1 a day (more, if you'd like), you will have a great head start on the upcoming holiday season with very little impact on your budget. You can also open a savings account specifically for the holidays and contribute to it year-round. And if you decided to go through your closets and sell the stuff you no longer need (you'd be surprised what you'll find in those jacket pockets!), you can put that into your holiday account as well.

4 Ditch Santa Lists. Even if you don't scrap the list altogether, rethink how to rein it in (pun intended). One couple I know allows their children to give them a list for two special items. Then they may give them smaller "practical" gifts, but they also use the extra money to sponsor a needy family in their area. Their kids love it! My husband and I use the extra money from paring down to sponsor children through Adventist Child India.⁸

5 Use cash. Research tells us that people spend 18 percent more using credit cards than cash. While credit cards have some benefits, if you know you have a difficult time staying within a budget for the holidays, it's best to use cash. For major purchases, cash can also be a motivator for the retailer to give you a better deal.

God calls us to be faithful stewards because it is where we find true freedom from the things of the world. And it helps to keep joy in our hearts and money in the bank so that our giving can reflect the heart of the Ultimate Giver.

¹ Taken from www.marketwatch.com/story/heres-how-long-it-will-take-americans-to-pay-off-their-christmas-debt-2017-12-29 on September 6, 2018.

² www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 9, 1884.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 26, 1882.

⁸ To learn more about this ministry, go to www.adventistchildindia.org.

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TIMELESS, NOT TEMPORAL

Everything seems up for grabs. In sports, loyalty to a team, a city, or a player means nothing. If a team doesn't produce trophies, sell it. If a city can't afford a billion-dollar stadium, abandon it. Find another! Life is about making deals and winning, and it's all centered around self as we've progressed, or digressed, from what was once the "used car mentality" to a "let's make a deal" society where some are willing to sacrifice or sell their birthright to satisfy a bellyache, as did Esau (Gen. 25:27-34).

He's one of Scripture's saddest figures: firstborn son of Isaac and Rebekah, twin brother of Jacob, beloved of his father and admired by his people as a skillful hunter. Yet he traded the riches of his birthright for a bowl of pottage he felt would bring him immediate satisfaction. Bible writers, preachers, and teachers of the Word almost always mention Esau unflatteringly.

But when we study his character it's distressingly clear how very much like him we are: at times worthy of appreciation for natural qualities such as courage, frankness, good humor; and at other times selfish and lacking self-control when it comes to wants and desires. Esau was a typical horseman of his day: hot-blooded, passionate, bold and free, with no intricacies of character. He was impulsive, even reckless, but also capable of nobility, the very opposite of his prudent, conniving, nimble man-of-affairs-twin, Jacob, who manipulated him, not once, but twice: first out of his birthright and second out of his father's blessing.

Being a creature of intense yearnings, Esau was in a crisis when he came home from the field that day. It was as if he

became a mere plaything of animal passion as he felt the pangs of hunger. He decided to satisfy his desire without thought of the consequences. This deep lack of self-control caused disastrous repercussions in terms of his birthright and earned him the designation as an immoral or godless person (Heb. 12:16).

The birthright (Hebrew: *bekorah*), belonged to the son born first and included legal claim to a double portion of the inheritance of a father's legacy. The firstborn male was automatically entitled to his father's blessing that included rule and authority over other members of his family. The birthright had spiritual rewards such as being anointed as patriarch and priest of the family, and the threefold blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:2, 3).

The spiritual blessing of the birthright was bestowed upon the Christian Church, also known as spiritual Israel and the church of the firstborn, Jesus Christ our Lord (Col. 1:15, 18; Rom. 8:14-18). Our birthright includes, but is not limited to, salvation by grace through faith; the power and presence of the Holy Spirit; all of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the kingdom of God; being caught up to meet the Lord in the air at His second coming; an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb; and a seat at the table with Prince Emmanuel.

Whatever our temptation, hunger, or thirst, Esau's story is written for us (1 Cor. 10:11). Why sell an eternal inheritance for the sake of a momentary bellyache? ▀

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CURE FOR THE
COMMON LIFE
HYVETH
WILLIAMS



ONE OF THE
SADDEST FIGURES
IN SCRIPTURE IS
THAT OF THE
FIRSTBORN SON OF
ISAAC AND
REBEKAH.

GIVE THE CHURCH AN **A**

*We have to begin together
if we want to stay together.*



Back in the dark ages, before I had ever heard of a Seventh-day Adventist, I spent four years at Western Washington State College (now Western Washington University) in Bellingham, Washington, majoring in music education. Just before graduation I dropped out of school because I knew that teaching music was not what I wanted to do. And to be honest, neither was it a career for which I was fully qualified.

I did (and do) love music, and I enjoyed the privilege of conducting our church orchestra on occasion. As they warmed up their instruments, but before they actually began to play, I always asked our pianist to play an A note. If you've been to a symphony you've noticed the concertmaster do this. The rest of the members of the orchestra can then tune their instruments to that A.

It is critical that everyone be in unison with that particular note. That note binds them all together. Once musicians begin to play we hear the joyous sound of many different notes, with alternate rhythms and varied harmonies. These variations do not create discord or disunity: just the opposite. We hear far richer sounds as each section plays uniquely, but with great purpose. And the singular act that makes it all work is that they all have tuned to A.

DISAPPOINTED BY DISCORD

I love my church. But I hear a disturbing sound from it today. It is a grating and troubling sound that tells me we are simply not in tune with one another. As it continues I hear various sections of the orchestra try to play over the others, as if by volume alone they can make their fellow musicians cave in to their noise. And noise it is, for it is certainly no longer music.

I am reminded of when those who survived the Babylonian captivity were allowed to return to Jerusalem and finally begin to rebuild the Temple. For a time, there was great excitement and anticipation. But as the building began to take shape there was discord.

"With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the older

priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away" (Ezra 3:11-13).

There was too much focus on the structure, and not enough on the goal. They could see the form. But they were not sufficiently contemplating the purpose of the structure, which was to house the presence of God Himself.

TAKE IT FROM THE TOP

How, then, do we get back on track?

First, as an individual I have to make a personal commitment to the Composer that I will play my part, not as a soloist, but as part of the greater body. I am only part of a masterpiece, but my part is critically important. Joining with the other parts we make music that brings joy to heaven.

Second, we all need to appreciate the varied instruments, talents, and sounds that come from other members of the ensemble. We don't all sound the same. We don't all use the same motions or talents, but we are much better for it. I want to respect the calling and gifting that has been done by God to bring each participant to their place.

And one more truth stands out: we must be tuned to the A. Unity does not come as a result of a conductor's demand, but rather as a result of each performer's acknowledgment of the one true note.

What is our A? It's certainly not for everyone to play the same instrument, nor is it that we all play the same line, same tune, or same rhythm.

For me, my A is the atonement. That certainly incorporates our picture of Christ as high priest as well as sacrificial lamb. If we are not in tune with that as our key note, the one note that binds the whole body of Christ together, then we are simply making noise.

I pray that those who lead this awesome, orchestrated body will clearly sound an A and encourage all members, in all their diversity, to be allowed to play their individual parts. 🎵

Marvin Wray is a retired pastor who lives in Grass Valley, California.

**I will play my part,
not as a soloist,
but as part of the
greater body.**

It's 4:00 on a Saturday afternoon and I am drowning. I can taste yesterday's mascara dripping down my face with an urgency that feels dangerously close to tears. The skies are an angry gray; the cobblestone streets at my feet fill and overflow with water.

Next to me, Shayla's hair has lost its flat-iron sheen in the humidity, and I know she will expect me to ask in nonexistent Italian if a restaurant is open. My shoes slip on pave-

ALONE BUT NOT ALONE

There's something remarkable about the kindness of strangers.

ment that's seen hundreds of years of use, and my footprints make no marks, only a momentary splash in the puddles.

My glasses are useless, and as I lug my backpack I wonder if this is how Joseph felt, carrying a wife who carried God and trying to find a place to rest.

ONCE UPON A LIFETIME

The day didn't start out like this. On our first break from studying in France, Shayla and I decided to spend a week touring Italy. After several days in the Florence area, Shayla's love for archaeology won out, and we took a day trip to the mountaintop town Volterra, home to several Roman ruins. We wandered and saw the sights under cloudy skies before deciding that it would be time to eat, as we (foolishly) hadn't earlier.

It begins to rain harder, considerably so, than the light sprinkles that had graced the morning. My feet ache from the extra pounds strapped to my back and the stress of trying

to find a place for myself and my friend. Nearly everything had closed.

Not only that, but provided we ever found a place to eat, this would be my last meal in Italy, maybe ever.

Rain sends fingers of cold down the back of my neck. Although by the second week of the Great Europe Tour I had grown used to feeling lost and unsure, I am hard pressed to think of a time I have felt more so: I know there is a long train trip back to Florence this evening, and I know I'll need food before then. I also know that Shayla's mood is dangerously low, because of the fact that the ruins were closed (thanks, rain), not to mention low blood sugar. So it's up to me to get us through this.

The light begins to fade, slipping behind the mountain we cling to. Tuscan suns fall quickly in autumn, and I don't know what this town becomes after dark. Its daytime incarnation is welcoming enough; but even the sweetest towns turn grotesque after dark, with shadowy places for lurking figures and burned through cigarettes. Neither of us speaks the language, and we're both college girls with hands too weak to wreak violence and backpacks too heavy to run.

HOPE DEFERRED

I see a sign with an arrow up ahead: *Ristorante. Please, Lord. We need this.*

We turn two corners and come close enough to see the oh-so-promising lights inside before we read the notice that says *chiuso*. Closed.

"It's closed," I say. Proof of Shayla's exhaustion is that she provides no sarcastic comment at the obvious statement. "We'll find somewhere else."

So we keep walking downhill through cold and drizzly streets in ever-fading sunlight.

We finally hit a street with a hotel light on. I figure the receptionist might have an idea of someplace to eat. We walk out of the cold, and a gust of warm wind hits me. Maybe we could just stay here for the next two hours. Nothing's open anyway.

I walk to the woman at the desk and say in English that sounds too American: "Do you know of any restaurants that are open?"

She starts to shake her head, clearly noting the hour and the rainfall, but sees the drowned-rat look we're sporting and thinks again. "There



**They say travelers
might be angels in
disguise, but I say it's
the other way around.**

might be one place," she says, and her voice is warm in the low lamplight. There's a storm outside and I think that maybe the innkeeper sounded like this when he offered God a room.

Five minutes and a hand-drawn map later, we're outside again, this time with purpose and the possibility of a warm meal.

It's even darker now, and I can't read the names of the streets on the map she's given me. "I think it's this way," I say over the sound of raindrops, even though I'm not remotely sure. We go down one street, then another. Nothing. I can't possibly be going the right way. One last turn, and I see a restaurant with a light on.

There's a menu on the street, but I don't see it. I don't see the name of the restaurant above the entrance; I don't see the accommodations or the lack of people inside. I see only the open door. "Wanna check here?"

Shayla shrugs. *OK, Lord, she's reached the point of not caring; and honestly, I'll be there too if this doesn't work out.*

We walk forward and stand, unsure, in the doorway. There's a man, mostly bald, behind a bar cleaning glasses. The restaurant is empty except for a family with small children seated at a table. There's no food or remnants of it, so I assume that they are the family that owns this restaurant on a back alley in a tiny town on the top of a mountain in Tuscany.

Without preamble I walk to the bar and ask, "Do you sell pasta here?" in a voice that is infinitely more pathetic than I want it to be.

There's a pause, pregnant with the possibility that we'll be out on the street again; that he'll say, "We're closed, I'm sorry," and that'll be it: rain, wind, and storm for the next two hours until the bus leaves. I wait for the negative.

Then, in accented English that sounds like sunshine or angel choirs or tomatoes being slow roasted in an oven, he says, "Of course! You are welcome! Please, come sit down!"

Something warm sparks in my chest and fizzes all the way to my toes. *Thank You, God.*

He shows us to a table, and we sit down, dropping our backpacks like the weight of the world. One of the women at the other table sets up place mats for us. Our host brings menus, asks where we're from. After conversing with us briefly in broken French (it may be better than mine; I can't tell from the few phrases he speaks), we order. Our

pasta arrives piping hot, and I have to stop myself from scarfing down the generous portion.

"That was miserable," Shayla says.

"It'll make a great story," I tell her, and she laughs, clear as a bell and radiant as the lamps that burn around us.

I think: *If this is my last supper, it is everything I ever wanted.*

THIS IS NO ACCIDENT

An hour later we've both finished our food, and our host offers dessert: lemon biscotti with almonds. I think it must be the Tuscan equivalent of washing our feet: the sweet, bright flavor feels just as refreshing as a foot wash in the desert.

Then at one point the man says, "Julia told me you were coming," and the dots connect. We found the right restaurant. The woman at the hotel called him to make sure he knew we were coming; to make sure the restaurant would be open to us.

It was open because we needed it to be, because a woman called a friend who was willing to reopen a restaurant in the middle of his time off for two starving, drowning, foreign students. It was no accident that the door was open when the restaurant wasn't. He opened the door for us.

And it certainly wasn't an accident that we found the restaurant in the first place.

We stayed for the next hour and a half, until we absolutely had to leave to catch the bus. I paid the bill and decided that 31 euros for both of us is some kind of theft on our part. What price can you put on hospitality? How can you pay for reassurance, for heat, and for an hour and a half out of the rain? How can you pay for an answer to prayer?

I didn't know how to show my gratitude. They don't tip in Europe, and besides, I have no cash to leave. I can only state my thanks in the only Italian I know—"grazie"—and pray they understand how much this meant.

They say travelers might be angels in disguise, but I say it's the other way around. The real angels are not the travelers; they are the people who say "Come in, it's warm, you are welcome" in accented English that sounds like music.

My last supper in Italy.

Even as I walked away from the restaurant and back into the cold and the rain, I felt warm. 🍴

Alexi Decker is a teacher's assistant in the English Department at Andrews University.



PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

Enjoy the Holidays

Without gaining weight!

Q: I overeat and gain weight over the holidays, then I can't get it off. What do you suggest?

A: For many, the Christmas season is, as the song goes, "the most wonderful time of the year." For others, not so much. It may be for them the loneliest time with loved ones missing, home circles shrinking, and the dread of going to holiday parties and New Year's Eve celebrations without a partner. Many end up staying home alone to lament their sorrows.

In the United States the season bracketed by Thanksgiving at one end and New Year's at the other poses a significant threat to waistlines as well as emotions, as many enjoy the goodies and the festivities or eat emotionally, only to end up fighting the "gaining" battle. (Even though different countries celebrate different holidays, all those studied show holiday weight gain that takes about five months to lose.*) The common factor: people's increased intake of their favorite festive foods combined with less outdoor physical activity, especially if outside temperatures are very cold.

Having a well-thought-out plan and sticking to it is a basic formula for success. But that is often easier said than done. The power to do anything good comes from God. So if you don't already have special daily prayer and devotional times, that's the place to start. God will work with you in every situation. Your prayers of thanksgiving before eating may be enhanced by asking for power to choose wisely and not be overcome by the tempting items before you.

We don't know whether you're a festive or an emotional eater, but we pray these words will bring you hope and help for the holidays and beyond. If you feel depressed around the holidays, you may need to seek professional help. Don't overlook this important detail.

May this holiday season be for you a "wonderful time of the year," and may the Spirit of Christ accompany you all year long. 🍀

* *New England Medical Journal*, 2016; 375:1200-1202.

Peter N. Landless, a board-certified nuclear cardiologist, is director of the General Conference Health Ministries Department. **Zeno L. Charles-Marcel**, a board-certified internist, is an associate director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference.



Useful Tips.

- Eat thoughtfully. Choose lower-calorie, high-fiber whole foods.
- Chew your food more times than usual before swallowing.
- Inhale right: certain aromas induce satiety (e.g., banana, peppermint, green apple) and may help you eat less.
- Restrict your celebratory eating to the holiday, not the whole season. Splurging on one day is better than eating too much for the whole season.
- Keep edible goodies out of view and out of reach.
- Sleep seven to eight hours per night. Adequate sleep fights weight gain.
- Dress warmly in layers and *increase* your activity, outdoor and indoor, despite the weather.
- Stay alcohol-free. It clouds your judgment at any quantity!
- Use sparkling and infused water rather than soft drinks or juices.
- Don't attend parties, festivities, or shopping events while stressed, thirsty, or hungry.
- Know your vulnerable times and situations. Preplan reinforcements (cell phone alarm, prearranged accountability call from a partner, etc.).

U.S. AIR FORCE PARTNERS WITH THE CARTER REPORT



The Carter Report team ran a campaign for Christ and Truth in Kiev, Ukraine in 1995. After the baptism of 3,530 precious souls in the Dnieper River, we decided our

work was not yet done. In Kiev, we had visited victims of the Chernobyl disaster. Medicines and equipment were urgently needed. The U.S. Air Force came to the rescue.

The Hercules C-130 is a big plane. The U.S. Air Force loaded this aircraft with more than 24,000 pounds of Carter Report medical aid. They then transported it to Kiev. **For free.** It doesn't get much better than that. This is how it happened. The meltdown at Chernobyl was the world's worst nuclear accident. It took the lives of thousands, some within days and others over a long period. Beverley Carter and our team members had visited hospitals and orphanages in Kiev that is only 80 miles from Chernobyl. What they saw left them in a state of shock. They saw babies suffering the tragic results of radiation. While Ukrainian caregivers were dedicated, medicines and supplies were desperately needed.

When we returned to the United States, we contacted Dudley and Ginger Snarr of Northwest Medical Teams International in Portland Oregon. We were able to purchase through them medicines and medical equipment at a greatly reduced rate. The U.S. Air Force was then contacted with the request: "Could you please help us airfreight 24,000

plus pounds of medical aid from America to Ukraine?" The answer was a magnanimous, **"Yes."**

I was there when the giant USAF Hercules came in low and circled Kiev airport. It was my privilege to lead a delegation of church and state officials to welcome the visitors. Ukrainian TV was there and the report made the evening news. The aircrew were great representatives of American generosity. Besides delivering more than 24,000 pounds of urgently needed medical supplies, the crew personally gave gifts to the Ukrainian people. I felt honored to be associated with these outstanding ambassadors of goodwill. This was the Lord's doing and it was marvelous in our eyes. ❖

We proudly proclaim this USAF C-130 aircrew, distinguished Carter Report heroes. May God bless them and the United States of America.



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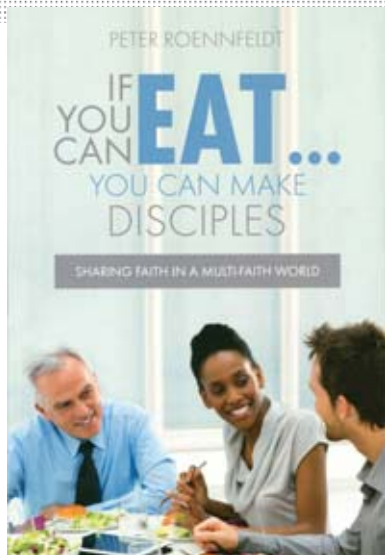
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CLOSER LOOK



Eat Up!

If You Can Eat . . . You Can Make Disciples, by Peter Roennfeldt, Signs Publishing, Warburton, New South Wales, Australia, 2018, 91 pages. Softcover, \$6.99. Reviewed by Stephen Chavez, *Adventist Review*.

Don't read this book if you don't want to be challenged. Don't read this book if the sum total of your Christian experience consists only of going to church on the right day and affirming each and everyone of the church's 28 Fundamental Beliefs.

If, however, you want to emulate Christ and His ministry methods, read this book. Read it again. Read it and share it with people who likewise want to be challenged to practice Christianity that's primitive, raw, and unadorned.

The first thing the author does in *If You Can Eat* is to remind readers that most of us no longer live in homogeneous communities. Peter Roennfeldt, a former pastor and church planting coach,

Good News About Sex

The Gospel of Sex: Dating, Relating, and Mating, by Dustin Hall, Remnant Publications, 2010, 96 pages. Paperback, \$6.95. Reviewed by Omar Miranda, teen mental health counselor.

The *Gospel of Sex: Dating, and Mating* is one of the clearest, most balanced, and practical books on the subject of dating, sex, and relationships I've read.

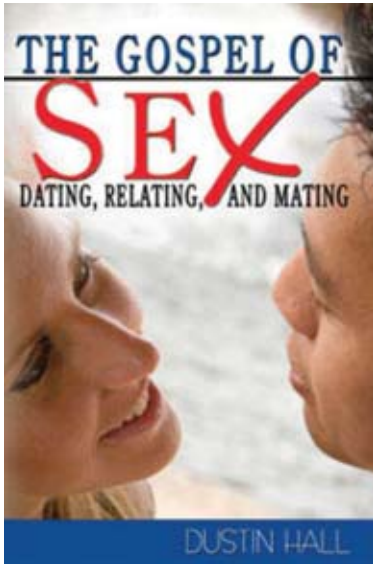
Author Dustin Hall does an amazing job at applying just the right balance of common sense and logic to this often-difficult topic. He then follows up with a well-reasoned plea that is solidly biblical, but not guilt-inducing. He couches his core message of abstinence in two core ideas:

1. Teens' abstinence should be based on a simple but profound response of obedience to God, which comes from thankfulness and gratefulness for His gift of salvation to them.
2. Teens' abstinence should be based on the logical premise that sex before or after marriage (with anyone other than their spouse) is simply not in their own best interest (nor in others') and

describes the neighborhood where he lives. Next door is an Indian family that practices Sikhism. Beyond that home lives a family from Sri Lanka who are Buddhists. On the other side of his house lives a family of Muslims from Albania. The neighborhood is also populated with Christians who are Roman Catholic, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Seventh-day Adventist. Thus the subtitle of the book: *Sharing Faith in a Multi-faith World*.

The rest of this short book is a prescription, biblically based, about how Jesus and His earliest followers engaged people who may or may not have shared the same religious, ethnic, or economic status.

The author's point is that Christians should



serves only to complicate their lives and the lives of others in compounded and unimaginable ways. To put it in terms that a teenager can understand: “If you choose to have sex now, you won’t be able to live your best life.”

Hall does a masterful job of writing with the successful and effective recipe of Bible verses, relevant Ellen White quotes, and actual teen vignettes/narra-

tives. He weaves everything together in a lively and quick-paced writing style. I appreciated most that he describes and explains very difficult topics, such as the emotional consequences of premarital sex, the brain chemistry changes involved in sexual activity, and associated clinical research. Then he takes the next necessary and crucial step and effectively applies what he’s writing about to how it affects readers, either positively or negatively.

Chapters are clean, direct, and short. Hall doesn’t shy away from describing and discussing sexually transmitted diseases, including statistics—something I rarely see in a Christian book on this topic—and addressing directly the parents of teens.

This is a well-researched and well-written book. As a trained and certified sex educator and mental health counselor, I will be requiring this book to be read by all my teen clients—and their parents. ♣

seek to share their faith with others, but that they should do it in ways that do not come off as arrogant or condescending. Often, he says, the best opportunities for sharing our faith come in neutral settings, such as at meals or at other social gatherings. His assertion is that now more than ever people of practically every faith tradition are looking for answers to society’s intractable problems: war, poverty, weather-related disasters, intentional violence perpetrated against unsuspecting and innocent targets.

The author ingeniously ties Bible stories about how God’s people interacted with the nations around them with historical accounts of how Christians through the centuries have tried (and

sometimes failed) to reflect the values Jesus demonstrated in His earthly life and ministry.

This is an extremely practical book. It contains short summaries of several of the world’s great religions: Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism. As with Roennfeldt’s previous books, *Following Jesus* and *Following the Spirit*, each chapter concludes with application questions that help readers understand that being disciples of Christ is more than just knowing all the right answers; being disciples means reflecting Christian values as we model Christ to those around us. ♣



GIFTS AND GIFT-GIVERS

We asked readers to respond to this question: Thinking about gifts and Christ's birth, God's greatest gift, what gift have you given or received over the years that has made a profound difference in your life, or in the life of someone you know?—Editors

My husband and I have tried to live within our means for 31 years of marriage. In spite of heart troubles, broken bones, and other reasons for hospitalization, we have managed and been blessed. Then our well pump stopped getting water to our cistern.

Now we are learning about gratitude and surrender because of all our friends and church members who contributed time, money, and knowledge to replace pipe, pump, and electric appliances so we can stay in our home, even as we are in our mid-70s. Praise God!

JEAN, OREGON

Igot my wife an *Andrews Study Bible* for Christmas one year. She used that gift every day until she died. The gift may have been for her, but her insights from that Bible blessed me often.

KERMIT, MARYLAND

A gift is something we share with others. Many of the gifts we give don't last very long. But the gift Jesus gave us in His life, death, and resurrection is a gift that will last for eternity. Thanks be to God!

WILLIAM, CALIFORNIA

I didn't start high school off on the right foot. After spending some time in special study halls for students with Ds and Fs, I was given a daily planner for Christmas. It wasn't so much the gift, but the look in my mother's eyes when she said, "I hope you can make good use of it."

I started my turnaround the very next semester. By the time I was a senior I was in the National Honor Society. I won a small college scholarship by writing about that gift.

Today my husband and kids tease me about my obsession for lists and organization. Truth is, I don't know how my life would have turned out if I hadn't learned about the difference organization can make.

LORI, TENNESSEE



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What We Don't Know About Technology

I've been thinking about a word lately: "incunabula."

The word is used by historians to refer to a period of time between A.D. 1450-1500, during which the first books were printed following the adoption of the printing press in Europe. "Incunabula" is the plural of the Latin word for "cradle" or "swaddling clothes," and by extension is used to describe the beginnings or earliest stages of something.

The printing press ushered in an unprecedented era of expanding knowledge. Both religious and scientific communities benefited from this technological marvel, which arguably fueled both the Reformation and the Renaissance.

Yet the earliest adopters of Gutenberg's innovation could not have been fully aware of the its far-reaching effects. In fact, researcher James Dewar argues "the important effects of the printing press era were not seen clearly for more than 100 years."¹

Thus the Incunabula Period has developed into a concept that goes beyond analyzing the earliest books to studying the implications of any technology. More specifically, it refers to a period of time during which a technology is used without a full understanding of its effects.

With this in mind, I would suggest that we find ourselves in the middle of our own incunabula period.

The rise of the Information Age has dramatically altered the human experience. These abilities have given us personal computers, video games, and the smartphone.

Societies have fully embraced these

innovations. Consider Apple, Inc., which recently became the first company in history to be valued at more than US\$1 trillion. We value technology for many reasons, not the least of which is efficiency. The latest app, box, or online subscription can help us do it faster, better, and with less hassle.

What we don't know is the full effect that this complete immersion in technology is having on us as a society and as individuals. But we are beginning to understand. An estimated 210 million people worldwide are addicted to the Internet and social media; teens who spend five hours a day on their smartphones are twice as likely to show depressive symptoms;² and 90 percent of people admit to using a phone while driving, half of them checking social media.³

I am a communication professional who has been immersed in technology for two decades and have used it to build up the kingdom of heaven.

However, technology also has a dark side, no matter how much benefit it brings to society. "We are already seeing unintended consequences in the Information Age that are dominating intended ones, and there are good reasons to expect more in the future," adds Dewar.

Consider these thoughts an appeal, especially to parents: Don't believe that technology is inherently beneficial. Take time to consider how technology impacts you and your family. Make necessary adjustments as you move into a digital future carefully and intentionally. ▀

¹ goo.gl/Gu1AMw

² goo.gl/vThsqe

³ AT&T, 2018

Costin Jordache is news editor and communication director for Adventist Review Ministries.

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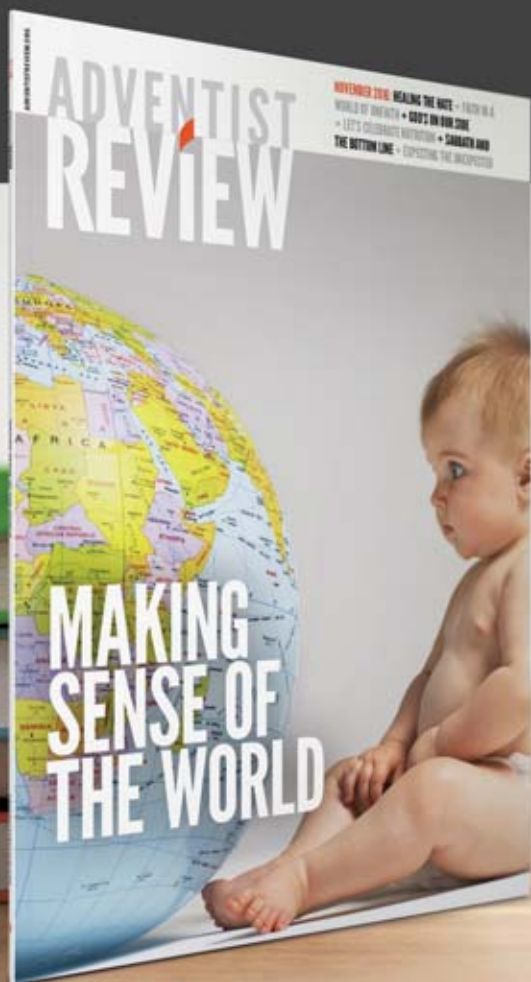
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